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HOPE MEREDITH.

VOL. II.



HOPE MEREDITH.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ST. OLAVE’S,” “JANITA’S CROSS,”
“THE BLUE RIBBON,”

&c. &c.

“A mien and face
In which full plainly I can trace
Benignity and home-bred sense,
Ripening in perfect innocence.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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HOPE MEREDITH.

CHAPTER I.

THE unusually elaborate nature of Miss Lauderdale's toilet left Hope Meredith and Uncle Mac alone for nearly half an hour in the drawing-room before the gong sounded for dinner. At least it was just the same as being alone, for Sir David, buried in his newspaper at the other end of the room, took no heed of what was going on in the curtained bay-window, where Mac was pretending to assist his companion in choosing colours for a frontispiece to her

etchings from *The Brook*. And Aunt Griselda, who would certainly not have left the two young people together if she could have known it, was dressing too. She and Hope had gone at the same time, but girls of nineteen or twenty, especially if they don't think themselves good-looking, are able to steal a march upon seventy, where a speedy toilet is concerned.

Nothing pleased Mac better than to be alone with this little English maiden. Her brave, honest, cheery dutifulness was very refreshing to him. There was something that answered to his own nature in the fearless independence with which she held her own opinions, and spoke her own thoughts, and went her own ways amongst these people whose life was so different from that to which she had been accustomed. And then Mac, with the clear vision of a pure heart, had seen through Miss Griselda's

schemes for putting Hope down, keeping her in her place, and they had roused within him a feeling of chivalrous tenderness which only wanted time to kindle it into love. Poor Aunt Griselda had better have been quiet. If she had treated Hope like an equal, Mac's heart would not have been so quickly troubled ; but injustice always roused him to pity for those upon whom it was exercised ; and pity in action towards a bright, simple, patient, and pleasant-looking girl like Hope Meredith, was more dangerous than even Auntie Grisel could suspect, else the good lady would surely have changed her tactics.

Hope did not get on very fast with the etching. Mac kept suggesting the most comical designs, sketching grotesque heads and passing them over for her inspection. Then he would try to copy one of her initial letters, and insisted upon her coming and sitting by him to see that he did it properly ;

then she must do a little bit for him herself ; and of course he must bend over her whilst she was doing it, or else how could he see how she put in the fine delicate little pen and ink touches ? And if, bending over her so, he looked more at the rich colour coming and going upon her cheek than at the picture that was growing under her strong little fingers, what wonder ? Anyone else would have done the same ; for truly the face was the sweeter picture of the two.

“ Doing this etching always reminds me of Miss Lauderdale,” said Hope, who wanted to make a remark of some kind, and could not think of anything else. She felt that Mac was looking at her, and her hands were beginning to tremble. “ I should never have known her at all if it had not been for the etchings in old Miss Asgard’s library.”

“ Then we will bless the etchings in old Miss Asgard’s library to the end of our days.

And I suppose I ought to bless Miss Lauderdale too, for she had as much to do with it as Miss Asgard. And that was the beginning of your coming here, was it? A sort of little interlude between one sort of hospital nursing and another?"

Hope gave her head an impatient little twitch.

"You are always laughing at me about what I am going to do. I believe you think it is only fun. And it is really not fun at all. I do mean it very much. I should have gone long ago, only Miss Lauderdale wouldn't let me."

"Admirable Miss Lauderdale! But I am not laughing at you. And if you jerk your head in that way, the motion is communicated to your hands, and the effect upon your work is not beneficial. Look there."

And Mac swept the little hand away, and

showed an ugly angle in the outline of an ivy leaf.

“What do you think nature will say to you for such work as that? It is what I call making fun of ivy leaves, whether I make fun of you or not. If you don’t do better, I shall hold your hand myself.”

Hope did do better, of course.

“I hope you will continue to make yourself useful to Miss Lauderdale, for I like you to be here. She is very different from what I expected, though. People told me she was so proud and reserved, and never took any interest in anything. I am sure she was bright and pleasant enough to-day. I was quite surprised.”

“And so was I. I never saw her like that before. And yet somehow I did not feel all the time that she was happy. I had rather see her sad and silent than with her eyes flashing in that bright, cold way. She

was not like my Miss Lauderdale at all."

"Then tell me what your Miss Lauderdale is like."

"Well, she is rather quiet and reserved, and she says very little, but what she says she means. She is all true through and through. But I think she was only talking in that way this morning because she felt she had to amuse the Regisons; and they like that sort of thing. I must have a curl of ivory for the top of this letter, and then a very beautiful head to put in the medallion."

"Here comes the head, then."

And Mac turned to the door, for Miss Lauderdale, in all her beauty, came sweeping in, proud, sparkling, animated, with an infinite grace of conscious beauty in every step and gesture. One quick glance towards the little table in the bay window was enough to show her the position of affairs.

there. With an air of easy, gay command she summoned Mac to her side, bade him bring a chair for her, a footstool, and then place a screen, so that the firelight should not fall too strongly upon her, all the while casting keen glances at Hope, who went on quietly with her work.

“Do you know,” Madolin said, looking laughingly up into Mac’s honest face, “it is quite delightful to have some one to wait upon me again. I had almost forgotten there was such a pleasure in life. Though at the same time, you know,” she added, archly, “I am very sorry to take you away from such a pleasant occupation. Now confess, am I not a great bore? I will promise not to think any worse of you if you say yes.”

“I should not like to risk it,” said straightforward Mac. “I remember you of old. You always liked to be first and foremost.”

"Well, and is there any harm in that? Does not everyone like to be first—with old friends, at any rate? But now, tell me the truth—nay, I know it already. I could see it the moment I came into the room. You wished I was far enough away. You and Hope were having the most delightful little conversation in the world."

"Well, yes, perhaps. Should you like to know what we were saying?"

"Oh! yes, do tell me. You don't know how anxious I am to hear all about it."

"Well, then, Miss Meredith was saying just as you came in that she wanted a beautiful head for the medallion she was drawing, and I looked up and said there was one for her, meaning you, of course."

"Thank you," and Madolin toyed gracefully with her silver fan. "That is very pretty—very pretty indeed. One ought to live in Canada always, if people

pay such delightful compliments there.

“Yes ; only one must have Miss Lauderdale to pay them to.”

“Thank you again. I had no idea you were so brilliant, Hope,” and Madolin turned carelessly to the window ; “it is too bad to leave you sitting there alone. Cannot you join us here?—or did you spend all the time you could spare from your work out upon the terrace this afternoon?”

And Madolin laughed musically, but there was a hard ring in the music.

Hope was bewildered. Could this bright, cold, glittering woman of the world, in whose eyes there was no longer any soul, or in whose voice any tenderness, be indeed the Miss Lauderdale who awhile ago had so passionately asked for love and sympathy, and who now seemed to need nothing from her? What did it all mean?—and how would it all end? But as her wondering,

truthful eyes asked the question, Madolin's flashed hurriedly away.

"Do let me see your work," she said; and Hope brought it. "Pretty—very. And Uncle Mac has been telling me he has found a head for the medallion. Yours, no doubt."

"Oh! no—Captain Cayley said yours was just the one. And I think so too. You look as if you had stepped down from one of the picture frames. You must not be vexed with me for saying it, but that powdered hair does look so nice."

"Thank you. It was a fancy of Catton's. I told her she might do just as she liked with me to-night, and you see the result. Uncle Mac, you might say that you are pleased, too."

Mac looked at the brilliant woman, then at Hope. Perhaps his eyes told which picture he liked best.

"The effect is very striking," he said. "I never saw it before. You must give me time to find out whether I like it or not."

Madolin's delicate lip curled.

"How very plain-spoken you are ! I think I should not like to live in Canada, after all."

And yet, if it had not been for the glance which she saw resting upon unconscious Hope, she would have been so well pleased with the plain speaking. Mac was fascinating her now, as Hope had done before, by that very freedom and independence which was so uncommon. Only Hope's freedom appealed to her love of truth, it told her what was right, and made her uncomfortable until she was willing to follow it. Uncle Mac's appealed to her love of power. He roused her antagonism ; she must conquer his indifference, she must make him own her sway.

At that moment Miss Griselda came in.

"Why, my dear!" she said, lifting up her hands, "it is Madame la Marquise again. How very charming! I have never seen you look so well since that night at the *Pension* when you acted in 'Richelieu,' and Gustave Nilken was the Louis."

"Mac, my fan if you please. I have let it fall."

"And that reminds me, Madolin dear, what an age it is since I heard of your acting in a charade. Why should we not get up one now, whilst Uncle Mac is here? The Regisons, you know, would be delighted to come, and the Milbanks. I believe the Colonel is a very good amateur. What do you say, now?"

"Charming!" said Madolin, brightly. "I should like nothing better, only Uncle Mac must take part. Do let us have a little gaiety once more. I am positively moped .

to death. One might as well be buried alive as live as we have been doing for the last eight years. I will give orders this very night, and Catton shall bring down the dresses. What is the use of always thinking and remembering?"

There was almost a wild light in her eyes. The little fingers holding her fan clutched it until every fibre and muscle in them seemed strained, and the parted red lips showed the teeth clenched like those of one in mortal agony. Just then the gong sounded for dinner. Sir David came forward to lead his sister into the dining-room. Captain Cayley offered his arm to Miss Lauderdale. Smiling gaily upon him she was about to take it, when a change passed over her face, her eyes closed, and she fell heavily back upon the sofa.

She had been putting too heavy a strain

upon herself for the last few hours, nature would have its own way now, and she fainted.

CHAPTER II.

UNCLE MAC carried her up into her dressing-room, and left her there with Hope.

“I know what to do,” said the girl, quietly. “Just go in to dinner as if nothing were the matter. When she is better, I will come down again.”

After awhile Madolin revived.

“Who is that sitting near me?” she said, feebly.

“It is I—Hope.”

And Hope took hold of the clay-cold, nerveless hand.

"No, not Hope," said Madolin; "not Hope any more now."

And the tears began to force themselves through the shut eyelids. Still she suffered Hope to stay by her and chafe her hands and fold her warmly up. But once, when the girl bent over and kissed her forehead, she turned coldly away.

"No, not that. I do not deserve that."

And then suddenly, wildly, she caught Hope's wrist, clutched the girl passionately to her, and then pushed her away.

"Go, go. I do not want you. You hurt me."

"Yes, you do want me," said Hope. "You never wanted me so much in your life, and I shall not go away. This is what comes, you see, of too much company and excitement. You have worn yourself out with it all, and now you need a little

commonplace thing like me to sit by you and take care of you."

But Miss Lauderdale said no word to that.

Aunt Griselda trotted up, brisk, pompous, officious. Could not dear Madolin fancy just the wing of a chicken with a glass of claret?—or a cup of tea, or a spoonful of jelly, or anything in the world to revive her?

No; Miss Lauderdale only wished to be let alone.

And Sir David came, feebly anxious and solicitous. Could he do anything for her? Should Dr. Clay be sent for? Did she feel as if she was going to be seriously ill?

No; Miss Lauderdale only wished to be let alone.

And Catton came with salts and sal volatile and hot bottles. Should she bathe her

lady's forehead, or sponge her hands, or fetch rugs and cushions?

No; Miss Lauderdale only wished to be let alone.

So by and by they did let her alone, in her pride and her misery and her beauty; only little Hope stealing in now and then to kiss the white cheek, and think a tender thought for the poor soul which was suffering far more than any of them knew.

Next morning Miss Lauderdale was no better, nor the next, nor the next, nor for many days. That faintness was the beginning of a low, depressed state of health, which might, so the doctors said, pass away or settle into slow fever. She lay on the couch in her little dressing-room, taking no notice of anyone, except now and then, when, as Hope, who rarely left the room, did some little service for her, she would

fling her arms round her neck and kiss her with passionate eagerness, then relapse into the sullen reserve which enveloped her like a cloud.

At last the fever did declare itself. Uncle Mac, who at Miss Griselda's earnest request had been staying day by day in the hope that Madolin would soon be herself again, was now permitted to attend to his business in London, and Hope took her place in the sick-room as nurse.

Well for Madolin that she did so. For as the fever reached its height, strange mutterings were heard within that curtained quietness. She seemed to be going back to her Heidelberg life; she rambled on about balls, concerts, charades, walks under the linden trees; then she spoke of Gustave Nilken and the little church at St. Elma, and her fingers worked restlessly at something which she fancied was round her neck.

"I always wear it here now," she said, looking vacantly into Hope's face, "my wedding-ring. It is long to wait, but he will come some time. You know he told me it was uncertain; he had business at Homberg."

And then she would drift away into disconnected sentences, sometimes speaking passionately, sometimes with pitiful pleading in her voice, sometimes calling upon Aunt Griselda not to refer so constantly to that wretched affair at Heidelberg. She could not bear it, she said.

A strange thought flashed across Hope's mind. Was Miss Lauderdale recalling something which had actually taken place? Was that romance which the schoolgirls had built up as they watched those two, one fair and the other dark, parting near the little church of St. Elma, no romance, but a reality? And was this the secret of the gloom which for

years had settled upon proud Miss Lauderdale? Was this why she shut herself out from friends, society, enjoyment, and said with such sad resolve that it was not her will to marry?

Hope's place was not to speculate, but to act. No room in her clear, honest heart for anything but duty. After that first day of delirium, she allowed no one to come into the sick-room, except when her patient was perfectly quiet. And Dr. Clay found her so well able to do all that was needed that he committed the care of the invalid into her sole charge. Indeed no one wished to deprive her of that privilege. Catton openly confessed her incapacity to do anything in a sick-room. Aunt Griselda, who had a dread of infection, was only too glad to keep at a safe distance, under pretext of devoting herself entirely to the wants of her poor dear brother, who was of course so very lonely now.

Besides, it was quite right, Miss Griselda argued, that the girl should do something in return for the kindness which she had been experiencing for the last two or three months. She had been made one of the family, introduced to their friends, placed in the full enjoyment of all that the Chase could afford of luxury and elegance; and now a fitting opportunity arrived for the display of her gratitude.

Of which opportunity Aunt Griselda must say she was availing herself very satisfactorily. No trained nurse could have been more quick and active and self-possessed. A little self-opinionated perhaps, as if no one knew but herself when the invalid should be allowed to speak a word, even to her own relations. Still one could excuse that. Nurses must be allowed to be despotic, or they would not take so much interest in their duties; and certainly, if Madolin had made

up her mind to have a fever, she could not have arranged it at a more convenient time.

So the doctor said, too, as Hope, bright, intelligent, clear-eyed, received his directions and rendered her account day by day ; obedient to his least wish, yet doing far more by her constant watchfulness than even his skill could accomplish.

After awhile, as the fever wore away, and weakness took its place, Madolin became entirely dependent upon her. She would take neither food, medicine, nor help from anyone but Hope. She would lie motionless for hours, her hand held in Hope's, her great wistful eyes fixed upon Hope's face. It seemed as if the fever which had swept away from her all her strength had also swept away the evil spirit of antagonism and defiance which had promised to work such mischief between them. And now Hope

knew why she had come to the Chase at all, and the thought of her work, well and faithfully done, and the little cloud of distrust cleared away which had arisen between her and her friend, made her bright and happy again, a sunbeam in the home which, but for her, might have been resting now under the shadow of death.

At last the day came when Madolin, the ghost of her former self, was able to be dressed and helped downstairs. What delight Hope had had in making everything ready for her in the big, comfortable dining-room! There were cold winds still, though more than a week of June had passed, so a fire had been made, and the softest couch drawn up, and a paradise of rugs and cushions arranged upon it. And flowers were everywhere, the sweetest and freshest Hope could find; and the new magazines were brought out, and some

books which Mac had sent from London ; and, half-hidden in their new green leaves, were some strawberries, the first of the season, which the gardeners had been coaxing into ripeness for the last ten days.

Madolin, pale enough, but peacefuller than she had been for many a month, smiled as she looked round upon all these little offerings of kindness. How much more beautiful she was now, Hope thought, than when, weeks before, she had swept into the drawing-room in all her splendour as Madame la Marquise. And Hope, true to her own sweet name, looked forward to days of rest and health for the weary, worn-out woman ; health of soul as well as body ; for might it not be that both together had come up from the gates of death to a new, sweet life ? And for those mutterings of delirium, Hope had almost dismissed them from her mind. It was not her place to

dwell upon them. It seemed an injury and a dishonour to her friend that she should ever have attached any reality to them. Indeed, the more she thought about it, the more it seemed to her that they might be explained by the conversation which had passed during Mrs. Regison's visit. Miss Lauderdale's weariness of life needed no such cause. It was the solitude of a noble heart cramped, confined, and thrown back upon itself, and hopeless of freedom. Now that would all pass away. She might win to content at last.

So Hope, sitting there a little apart from Madolin's couch, watched the pale, wan face with an infinite love and longing at her heart. And she only thought, as the days went on, how sweet it would be to tend the sufferer back to health, and build up a better life from the ruins of the old one.

CHAPTER III.

MADOLIN had begun to remember now. For the first time since her illness she asked after Captain Cayley.

“Poor Uncle Mac! he did not have much of a visit, after all. It was too bad that he should have to be sent away.”

“Never mind,” said Hope. “It was a great deal worse for you than for him. He will only have so much more time when he does come back again. And he has not forgotten you. He has been so kind. He has kept sending you all sorts of things from London, flowers, and fruit, and ice, and I don’t know what. I used to tell you about

them all at the time, but you never took any notice."

A faint smile gleamed for a moment over Madolin's face, and then she turned away. Hope thought she was sleeping, but instead the soul had awakened and was living deeply, keenly again. The past had awakened too; so had the future, with all its dreary possibilities of woe.

"Hope."

"Yes, I am here."

"Come close up to me."

Hope drew her low chair to the side of the couch, and folded in her own, so soft and warm, Madolin's cold, nerveless hand that seemed feeling out for some comforting clasp.

"I suppose I have had a fever, Hope."

"Yes, and you have struggled bravely with it, and come out on the right side at last."

"I don't know about coming out on the right side. It is not always on the right side when one comes back again to the pain of living."

"But it need not be pain to you any more. We will begin again, and it shall be peace instead of pain."

"Peace, peace, where there is no peace," Madolin muttered, under her breath. And then after a little pause, she said—

"I have one thing to ask you, Hope; and as you wish to be honestly dealt with yourself in your life's sorest need, deal honestly by me now."

Hope knew what was coming.

"I will be quite true to you, Miss Lauderdale."

"I suppose there were times when I was delirious. Most people are so, I think, when they have fevers."

"Yes."

Hope looked clearly, straightforwardly into the eyes that were bent upon her with such eager questioning.

"Do you know anything about me now, Hope, which you did not know before?"

Hope hesitated.

"I see you do. That is enough."

"No. I do not think I do. You talked strangely and very wildly sometimes, but I could always account for it from what had passed before. You know, the very morning before you were taken ill, Mrs. Regison had been here, and we were talking about Heidelberg, and the church of St. Elma, and the people that I had seen there one day."

"Oh, yes, so we had," said Madolin, sharply, "and that had fixed itself upon my mind. I suppose I talked about it more than anything else. And the rest of the people heard me, did they?"

"No. Dr. Clay gave the care of you into my hands, and I did not allow anyone to come into your room, except when you were quiet. No one else knew, and no one else will ever know, anything that you said."

"Thank you," said Miss Lauderdale, very proudly. And she drew her hand away from Hope's clasp. "I did not fear that you would be so dishonourable as to repeat anything which I might have said. And as you suggest, Mrs. Regison's miserable gossip must have been floating in my mind. But we will let the subject drop."

Something in her tone chilled Hope ; still more the withdrawal of the hand. Miss Lauderdale turned her face away again, and said she wished to be quiet. After that she became silent, reserved, passive.

She recovered wonderfully, the doctors said, considering what a severe attack it had

been. Her splendid constitution helped, of course. The Lauderdales never did die off like other people. And then she had been blessed with such good nursing. The most experienced sister that ever a London hospital sent out, could not, Dr. Clay said, have done more for her, or waited upon her more patiently and intelligently.

To which praise of Hope, Miss Lauderdale listened with not much interest or response. It wearied her to owe so much to one whom she was ceasing to love. And Hope must know now, though with a tender pitifulness she would not say that she knew. Tender pitifulness. It was not tender, it was cruel; for it lifted Hope so far above her, and she wanted to be able to dislike her, to have some good reason for turning from her, even getting rid of her. If she would only do something that was not always patient and good and noble.

Madolin let these thoughts come now, and did not turn from them any more.

Miss Griselda, quick-eyed in everything that concerned Hope, noticed this change with secret satisfaction, though she little guessed its reason. She had never been able to submit to Hope's supremacy in her niece's affections; still less to the position accorded her during Madolin's illness. Most likely now, she had been drawing the reins a little too tightly, and Madolin, whose spirit was returning with returning health, was not one to submit to that sort of thing. The end would be a separation, a most satisfactory end too, she must say, and she would try if she could not expedite it a little.

"You want society, my dear," she remarked one day, as Madolin in the midst of books, pictures, and flowers, stretched wearily upon her sofa. "I can't think why Miss

Meredith is so determined to keep you shut up from everybody. It is really a little too much that she takes upon herself the choosing of your company in this way. I expect by-and-by it will be a favour even for me to come in and have half-an-hour's chat with you. Why, what do you think? The other day I was suggesting to your papa that dear Gertrude Regison should come over for a week or two, just to cheer you up a little, you know, and he referred the matter to Miss Meredith; and as coolly as possible she stopped it by saying that she did not think such society would do you any good."

"I am much obliged to Miss Meredith."

"Of course, after that I was silent. Ridiculous! As if she were the mistress of the house. And the way she talks to Sir David and gets round him."

"And perhaps tells him all about what I said when I was wandering," suggested

Madolin, with a sharp quiver of light through her half closed eyelids. Hope had said not, but who could tell?

“No, on the contrary, she seems to consider anything you said her own peculiar property. It is impossible to get a word out of her, beyond the merest generalities.”

“Then you have asked?” said Madolin keenly. And in her heart she despised her aunt, but she could not afford to show that now.

“Well, my dear, it was natural that we should wish to know the turn your illness was taking, so dreadfully anxious as your dear papa and I were from day to day, and unable to settle down to anything. In fact, my poor brother wandered about the house like one distracted—could neither eat nor sleep nor rest; and, for my part, if Miss Meredith would have shown a little more consideration in admitting your nearest

friends to your presence, I should have had the utmost satisfaction in ministering to your wants so long as I had health and strength for such a pleasing task. However, when I found myself so completely supplanted——”

And Miss Griselda gave her knitting a decisive little tap, which settled affairs completely.

“I had my own thoughts about it,” the good lady continued; “and also about the extreme deference which she has manifested of late to your dear papa. Of course people of that class have their own ends to gain; and if she could sufficiently ingratiate herself with the family to have a little provision made for her, I have no doubt it would meet her views exactly. Those artless people often have a wonderful amount of depth. Of course, my dear Madolin, I don’t in the least reflect upon *your* discernment. Anyone might have been deceived,

for whom she took such pains to make herself agreeable; but I only just mention it to put you on your guard. And I *hope* you will not find it difficult now to resume your proper position and authority in the house."

Three months ago, a speech like this would have roused Madolin's wrath. All the generosity left in her would have been called forth to defend her friend from the unjust suspicion of selfishness. Now, however, it did not displease her so much that Hope should be misunderstood. The bonds which once drew them so closely, were fast becoming burdensome to her. Madolin lacked that finishing touch of nobility which can carry itself gracefully beneath an obligation. So long as she was the acknowledged bestower of kindness, so long as those blest by her favour received it meekly, as subjects the courtesy of a queen, so long she was gracious, so long all that was best

in her came to the surface. But to lie helpless beneath the burden of another's services, and that other her social inferior, one who at first had only received out of her own overflowing bounty—that was more than Madolin Lauderdale could bear. And how much more than even that must be borne from Hope Meredith! With what terrible power was she invested now over her former patroness! And that she did not glory in that power, that she did not even seem conscious of it, that her bright face and gentle demeanour and simple quiet ways were unchanged, showed only a grand superiority of nature which Madolin could not any longer brook. If any excuse could be made now for Hope to go away, how gladly she would receive it, how gladly bid a courteous farewell to one too noble to be dwelt with any longer as an equal, but

whose very nobility, while humiliating, was yet a safeguard against betrayal.

But the time was not yet come for any open measures. She only replied, as though the whole subject were one of perfect indifference,

“Don’t worry yourself, Auntie Grisel. Hope has been very kind; and as for what you hint at, I am sure she would never stoop to anything of the sort. Hope is the most straightforward girl I have ever known. And as for the Regisons, she was quite right there. I really do not want them. Gertrude would bore me to death just now.”

“Miss Milbank, then.”

“No; not Miss Milbank, either, with her everlasting sensible talk and plans for doing good amongst poor people. I think she would bore me as much as Gertrude Regison. I want somebody different from everybody else.”

“I think, my dear, I once heard you remark at Heidelberg—”

“Auntie! for mercy’s sake don’t remind me of anything I may ever have remarked at Heidelberg. I have no doubt I have said plenty of foolish things there. I wish you would understand that whatever I once happened to say at that horrible *Pension*, I would say exactly the contrary now. There; let us be quiet a little while.”

Aunt Griselda knitted on in dignified silence. By-and-by Madolin said—

“I wonder how long Uncle Mac is going to stay in London. Was any arrangement made about his coming back to finish that unlucky visit?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure, my dear. He used constantly to be sending down to inquire about you, and I should think, poor fellow! he would be only too glad of an opportunity of renewing his intercourse. It

was perfectly miserable to see him those first few days when you were ill, and Miss Meredith was so busy waiting upon you. He wandered about the house like a man in a dream, and if he could happen to meet her anywhere was so anxious to hear all about you. A kind-hearted man, exceedingly so, though a little rough. But then what is external polish when everything else is so exactly what one could wish?"

"I am quite well enough now," said Madolin vaguely. "And if Hope went away for a little while, as I suppose she must for rest and change—you know she has been shut up a good deal lately—it would be rather an amusement than otherwise to have Uncle Mac here."

Aunt Griselda took the hint. That very night a letter was despatched to Captain Cayley, telling him that Madolin was regaining her health and strength very rapidly,

and that in the course of a fortnight or three weeks, nothing could give them greater pleasure than to see him down at the Chase for as long a time as he could spare.

“Not earlier than a fortnight, I think my dear,” said sage Miss Griselda to her niece, “because you know it will take some time for Miss Meredith to make her arrangements for leaving. Besides, you will have recovered your looks a little more by then.”

And Madolin acquiesced.

CHAPTER IV.

BUT how often the best concerted schemes are vain ! Uncle Mac, sitting alone there in his London hotel, looking over business papers in readiness for that land affair, had been wondering when he might be allowed to come and finish his visit at the Chase. And as day after day brought tidings of Madolin's returning health, but no tidings of returning invitations, he determined to take matters into his own hands, and come down for a month or two to rooms in some little house in Nunthorpe village. So long as there was some place where he could be quietly to himself, he could attend

to his business as well in the country as in London ; and for all the rest, how much happier it would be !

For how often now the thought of Hope Meredith came back to him ! Hope, as he had seen her first, with her bright blossom-like face, in the woodland path beside grim old Aunt Griselda ; Hope fixed down in that draughty corner of the Rosbury drawing-room, with no one to talk to her, no one to take any notice of her, until he came ; and then how quickly she was bidden away from her place by the watchful duenna ! Hope as she had sat by the willow brook fishing, talking her way into his heart as no other girl had ever done yet, so unconscious all the while, simple, saucy, bewitching, with her rosy cheeks and clear laughing eyes, and quaint, half-shy, half-defiant ways ; and, best of all, Hope, as she sat by that little table in the oriel window, the colour

coming and going upon her face because he was so near; the sweet tell-tale trembling of her hand when he touched it, revealing, better than any words could tell, that she was beginning to care for him just a little. That was the picture Mac loved most to dwell upon. That was the picture that brought him back to Nunthorpe.

Brought him sooner than Aunt Griselda could have wished. For it so chanced that the very day before Sir David's letter reached him, he had written to an old woman in the village—the sexton's wife—and engaged her rooms, intending to come to them at once. Of course, as he was not to be Sir David's guest, he could choose his own time, and that time could not be too soon, a great longing having come over him to see Hope again. So instead of waiting until Madolin had won back a little more of her beauty, and Miss Meredith had

been quietly packed away to some convenient place for change and rest, he answered Sir David's letter in person, presenting himself at the Chase a day or two after it was written.

Rather to Miss Griselda's discomfiture, as she heard his firm step and hearty voice in the hall, and came trotting out to receive explanations. And yet, on the other hand, what could have brought him so speedily, except his desire to see dear Madolin again? And why should dear Madolin herself have hinted at his coming, unless she was prepared to make herself agreeable as something more than a mere acquaintance?

Now if only that troublesome Miss Meredith could be got rid of, everything would be as pleasant as possible. And really Madolin had not seemed so infatuated with the girl lately. Most likely she had been assuming a little too much authority, and

her niece was not one to tolerate that kind of thing. She could be as kind as anyone to those she fancied, but once let the kindness be taken advantage of, and she would soon put an end to it. Aunt Griselda had known how it would end for some time—indeed, ever since Miss Meredith had laid herself so open to Captain Cayley's attentions. Madolin could not help, even though she had been too proud to own it at first, seeing what the girl was aiming at; and now this assuming of a place which did not belong to her in the house, was putting the finishing touches to a friendship which had never had any solid foundation.

So Mac spent nearly all his time at the Chase, the lodging being only a matter of form; and pleasantly Madolin smiled upon him, and graciously she accepted the strong tender kindness which he was always ready to give to those who needed it.

"I am sure men are a great deal better nurses than women," she said, the day after he came, as she leaned on his arm to saunter up and down the terrace. "They always seem to know what you want. You don't have to keep asking and asking always."

Madolin said this too with just a touch of spite as they were passing near the open window where Hope sat, ready with shawls and wraps if they should be wanted. If Hope heard it, so much the better. If not, it would still please Mac, for did not men always like having credit given them where they least deserved it? And how could she flatter his self-love better than by telling him he surpassed even Hope, who was always considered to be the very perfection of thoughtfulness and unselfishness?

"I don't think you ought to say that, Miss Lauderdale," replied Mac, glancing quickly, but not too quickly for his

companion to notice it, towards Hope.

“Oh, it is of no consequence, Miss Meredith will not hear. And call me Madolin, I dislike to be called Miss Lauderdale by old friends like you.”

“Madolin, then,” he said, correcting himself in a matter-of-fact way which was not entirely pleasing, “but the harm was not in Miss Meredith’s hearing of it; it was in your saying of it. I think you would not have looked so well as you do now, if, when you were too ill to ask, somebody had not taken very good care of you. Better care of you I think than she took of herself, judging by her pale cheeks now. She is scarcely more than a shadow of her old self.”

“I am sure Miss Meredith ought to be very much obliged to you for your sympathy,” Madolin said, pettishly. Supremacy was one of the strongest instincts of her

nature. Slaves, admirers, flatterers she must have. That Uncle Mac should have cared enough for Hope Meredith to notice her appearance at all, was a sting. A strange desire arose within her to win him from this woman, this young girl rather, in whose debt she was placed, whom she was beginning to hate ; to hate simply because she knew she ought to be grateful to her. And in some women's hearts there is no hate so deep, so utter as that which comes where gratitude ought to have been.

"But you must forgive me," she said, leaning a little more heavily upon his arm. "I am not well yet, and the least thing makes me so dreadfully ill-tempered."

"Shall we go in, then? You are tired ; you want to rest."

"Yes ; come and make my sofa ready for me ; and the air has made me so sleepy too,

and cold, you will have to wrap me up like a mummy."

"Or rather like one of our Canadian ladies in the winter time. I know all about that. I will make you so warm and comfortable, and then you will have a delightful sleep, and be ready for no end of fun this evening."

"How good you are, Uncle Mac! Why did I not have you here weeks and weeks ago?"

"Because you did not send for me. I would have come directly, if I had thought you wanted me."

Madolin smiled, and then she suffered Mac to lead her into the drawing-room, and spread her rugs upon the sofa, and cover her up, and arrange the cushions under her head. Of course when that was done, and she did not hurry him over it at all, rather made him do and undo and do over again,

to lengthen out the pleasure of being waited upon, she expected her cavalier would take a seat near her and engage her in pleasant conversation until she went to sleep.

But no ; Mac was not going to do anything of the sort.

“Now,” he said, when everything had been arranged to the best of his ability, and a most sweet smile bestowed upon him, “I am going to run away with Miss Meredith for a little while. I am sure she wants a walk very much indeed.”

“Oh, thank you, Captain Cayley, you are very kind,” said Aunt Griselda, who had been watching the wrapping up process with great satisfaction, “but Miss Meredith generally remains and reads to dear Madolin when she comes in from her walk, and that sends her to sleep. You know it is so very important for her to sleep as much as possible. Miss Meredith, I am sure you would

not be so unkind as to think of doing anything of the sort."

"Yes, she will, Aunt Griselda," said Uncle Mac. "I shall answer for her myself. Madolin told me just now that the air had made her dreadfully sleepy, and so she will not want any other opiate. And Miss Meredith looks as if she wanted somebody to make her go out a little more. You know it is one of the hospital rules that nurses shall spend a third of their time in rest and exercise, and I don't think she has been doing anything of the sort."

"Oh! don't distress yourself, Captain Cayley. We really have not been so very cruel to Miss Meredith. Her time has been left entirely to her own disposal, though I am sure we are very, very much obliged to her for having devoted so much of it to dear Madolin. We have made her take every possible care of herself, of course."

"Then I am sorry it hasn't produced a better result. However, she shall go out with me this afternoon. Run away, Miss Meredith, and get ready."

"Do you really want me?" Hope whispered, bending over Madolin. "I am sure I will stay if you do."

"Oh! dear, no, nothing of the sort. I can do as well as possible without you. Pray go out with Captain Cayley, and make yourself quite happy. I am sure I don't wish to hinder you."

There was a sting in Madolin's voice as she said the words, and a sharper sting in her eyes; how different from the eyes and the voice which had thanked Uncle Mac a moment before. Then with just one regretful pang, for she saw Hope looked grieved, she closed her eyes and turned away as if weary. What was it all worth? Let them go their way. Oh, if the end would come, for truly

life was over-bitter ! And her lip curled with scorn against herself ; but she no longer listened to the little voice within her which would have led her to peace.

So Hope Meredith and Uncle Mac went out in the sweet pure sunshine, away up to the top of the moor, whence a heathery slope led to the little stream among the willow and fir-trees. Hope enjoyed it. She had never had a real walk since that morning, two months ago, when she had met Uncle Mac and helped him to fish ; and then he had come with her as far as the house, and said good-bye to her so kindly. The brief snatches of fresh air, caught at intervals for mere life and breath, when Madolin's fever was at its worst, had no sweetness in them ; and the tedious airings with Miss Griselda, which had been vouchsafed occasionally since, had worse than no sweetness, they were positively bitter, like most other

things which that good lady portioned out to her. But this walk was so different, and almost the old pleasant saucy feeling came back upon her.

Besides, it was so good to be cared for. Perhaps, with all her unselfish helpfulness and thought for others, none felt more keenly than Hope Meredith the delight of being with some one stronger than herself; of receiving, instead of always giving. Miss Griselda required as much waiting upon as an empress when they went out together. She could not go quite so fast, or she was being taken along too slowly for the air to do her any good, or she must lean like a dead weight, or she must have her extra wraps carried for her, or she must be talked to and amused, or she must stop in the broiling heat because sunshine was good for her rheumatism, or she must stop to rest in the very windiest places because *she* was

warmly enough wrapped up; and no one ever thought whether Hope was having a good time or not.

“I mean you to go right up to the top of that hill,” said Mac, pointing to the moorland slope, “the air there will do you a world of good. Take hold of my arm; no, fast hold, not as if I were taking you from one room into another for dinner. I want to feel that I am really helping you.”

“You are then, whether you feel it or not. But I don’t think I can go right up to the top of that hill now.”

“And why not? You could do it easily enough a couple of months ago, and you ought to be able to do it now. I see how it is, you have been wearing yourself out for other people. I believe, if you had what was good for you just now, you would be cared for and looked after as much as Madolin. Pray who sees that you get

enough sleep and rest and fresh air and all the rest of it?"

"I do myself, and I'm all right; but please don't go quite so fast up this hill."

"Oh! and so that is what you call being all right, that you have to stop and take breath half way up a little thimble-pie like this. Hope, listen to me. Will you let me call you Hope?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Well, then."

And Mac turned round, and keeping fast hold of Hope, looked down into her flushed face with a sort of tender, grieved pitifulness in his own. It was worth being tired, the poor child thought, to be looked at in that way.

"Hope, you've been going and doing a great deal more than you have any right to do. I could see from the first that you would do it if other people would let you;

and Miss Griselda is just the one to get as much out of you as she can; but I didn't think Madolin would let you wear yourself out in this way."

"Miss Lauderdale has not," said Hope, eagerly. "She is very good indeed. She has said over and over again that I was doing too much; but I wanted to do it—there was no one else who could do it. I did it because I wished—I really did."

"And will you give over doing it now, because I really wish? Suppose your life may be valuable some day to some one else besides Madolin and Miss Griselda."

"I don't know, I'm sure. I only know it's a good thing for me to keep as strong as I can, because it would be a very awkward thing if I were ever not able to work."

"You child!" said Mac; "as if there would never be anything for you but that.

Well, come along—there is the top of this hill to get up to.”

And half leading, half carrying her, Mac strode along over the heather, only wishing, when at last he planted her comfortably down on a mossy hillock at the top, that it had been twice as high.

“I told you you could do it well enough if you had me to help you; and now, if it were not for Auntie Grisel, we would stay here all the afternoon; but I suppose she would think you were neglecting your duties as nurse, and we won’t put her out of temper. We’ll have a good run down to the bottom when you’re rested.”

“I’m rested now,” said Hope—“quite rested.”

“Don’t you like to be here, then?” And poor Mac looked disappointed.”

“Oh! yes; only——”

“Well, is Miss Griselda the ‘only’?”

“Yes; and Miss Lauderdale, too, a little bit. If I don’t read her to sleep, I read to her when she wakes up, and she will be awake long before now.”

“Then supposing there hadn’t been any ‘only,’ would you like to have stopped here rather a long time?”

“Yes, I think I should.”

“All right, then. I won’t say any more about it. But you must promise me to come up to the top of this hill every day, so long as you stay at the Chase. Now will you?”

“I don’t know—I’ll try.”

“You can’t do more than that. Come to-morrow, and try by yourself, and if it tires you very much, you shan’t do it again alone. I’ll come and help you. You know I shall not be very sorry if you can’t do it alone; but still, you shall try. Hope, I won’t have you wearing yourself out in this

way, for all the Lauderdale in the world. Now keep fast hold of me still, and we'll have a run down."

"It was harder work than you expected, wasn't it?" he said, as Hope, panting and trembling, but ten times brighter and happier than she had looked a couple of hours before, steadied herself at the bottom of the hill. "It's just what you want, to get a good shaking like this every day; and I don't mean to let you have any peace until you get it. There now, take hold of my arm again."

"But it is not uphill any more now."

"Never mind—you are tired all the same. Lean all your weight upon me."

They walked on very quietly for awhile, down the woodland path, past the little stream, up to the entrance of the great elm avenue that led to the house.

“Hope, would you like me for a crutch to lean upon always?”

“I think you perhaps wouldn’t care for it by-and-by,” said Hope, with a great tremble in her voice.

“I didn’t say anything about that. I only asked you if you would like it. The tiring is *my* concern.”

“If you please there is Aunt Griselda on the terrace—do let me go.”

And Hope bounded away from him just as Miss Griselda emerged from the shelter of one of the great yew-trees.

Mac stood looking after her.

“I wonder whether she cares anything for me,” he said to himself. “I’m sure of this, though, if she does not lean upon me, no one else shall.”

CHAPTER V.

MEANWHILE Aunt Griselda had been expressing her sentiments to Madolin in the dining-room. She was no longer afraid of that calm, proud resistance which baffled her so when first she tried to undermine poor Hope's position. Madolin did not openly express any change of feeling; but that the change was coming, quick-witted Aunt Griselda saw plainly enough. Indeed, what else could be expected? Her niece seemed wishful to make a favourable impression upon Captain Cayley. Miss Meredith, without being apparently wishful to do

anything of the sort, was yet doing it far more effectually. Madolin could not help seeing that, and of course it must naturally put a stop to any friendship which had once existed between them. If Madolin Lauderdale had a bit of the old *Pension* character left in her—and events of late seemed to show that she had—nothing would arouse her resentment like a rival; and therefore could she once be made to look upon Hope Meredith in that light, matters would be in a fair track for her dismissal. Accordingly Aunt Griselda set to work.

“I have been thinking,” she said, as she watched Hope and Uncle Mac disappear at the farther end of the avenue—“I have been thinking about this little friend of yours a good deal, Madolin.”

“So have I, Auntie Grisel. She has been very kind lately.”

“Very kind, my dear, with the exception

of taking rather too much upon herself during the latter part of your illness. I must say it always annoyed me a little that Dr. Clay placed the management of your room entirely in her hands. He explained it by saying that he had known her skilfulness in the Matchborough Hospital; but then, as I represented to your papa, that was no reason why we should be put under her authority too. A girl ought to possess a remarkable combination of qualities to sustain such a position in a house like this."

"Well," said Madolin, wearily, "we have come to the end of that. I shall soon be quite well now. Uncle Mac seems to have taken very kindly to her."

Miss Griselda looked keenly at her niece, to note touch of jealousy in voice or manner. She could not discern either; but then Madolin might be too proud to show it

until matters had been pushed a little farther.

“Very kindly, indeed, my dear. In fact, that is what I was going to speak to you about. If Miss Meredith is to stay here much longer, I think it is tolerably easy to see how matters will end. I hinted at a possibility of something of that sort, three or four months ago, when you stated your intention of having her here during Captain Cayley’s visit, but you seemed to think it was of no consequence.”

“I don’t think it is of much consequence now,” said Madolin.

Did Aunt Griselda think, then, that this little country girl, with her ordinary face and simple, unschooled ways, could stand against her own proud queenliness when once she roused herself to conquer? Let Uncle Mac amuse himself for awhile. And Hope did not so much need love; she could

do without it. It was not for such as she. She had youth and health, and work to do, and her living to earn; let her be content with these things for a year or two, and leave such conquests as Uncle Mac to those who must have excitement, who wanted something to break the intolerable monotony of life. And yet it was well to seem careless about it. She knew what Aunt Griselda wished. She might have her wish now; but Madolin would not appear to join her own with it. And so she said, with that quiet Lauderdale indifference,

“I don’t think it is of any consequence now.”

“Well, my dear, that is as it may be. I only mention what has suggested itself to me. Of course I do not wish to interfere with any of your arrangements.”

“I don’t think I have any arrangements,

auntie. Things seem to go pretty much as they like."

"As Miss Meredith likes, you mean, Madolin. Everything appears to be arranged, now, to suit her convenience. It is perfectly incomprehensible to me, the manner in which she has wound herself round your papa. He thinks nothing can be done without her. For my part, I must say I mistrust those exceedingly unselfish people. There is generally something underneath it all."

Madolin knew that her aunt's words had not a particle of truth in them, but she did not attempt to contradict. She wanted Hope away herself; and yet there were moments when she could have despised herself for that want. Hope's fault was that she had laid Madolin under an obligation which the proud woman could not bear. Hope's fault was that she knew what Madolin would

fain have kept from her. Hope's fault was that she had generosity enough safely to guard that knowledge. But Hope's greatest fault was that Uncle Mac had looked tenderly upon her. So, then, she might go. But Aunt Griselda should do it all.

"I don't think I have much strength to consider the matter," she said. "Papa is not generally mistaken about people."

"Certainly not, my dear; and I would not for a moment intimate that he is mistaken in this case. Only, you must agree with me, I think, that some change ought to be made; and as you are too weak to be troubled with it yourself, I have been thinking about it instead. Miss Meredith intends to train for a nurse, does she not?"

"Yes. At least, she told me so at first."

"Exactly so; and Dr. Clay says it is what she is most qualified for. Well, then,

I see an advertisement in the Matchborough paper to-day for an assistant superintendent in the hospital there. A good salary will be given to anyone with first-class recommendations, and of course it will be an opening to something better. Now, what an opportunity for Miss Meredith! I really think she ought not to let it pass. Just the very thing, you know, that she has set her mind upon, and would suit her so admirably. A word from Sir David to the governor would settle it at once, especially when Dr. Clay added his own recommendation, as he would do of course, if he knew we were anxious for it. Could anything be more fortunate?"

"I suppose not," said Madolin, carelessly. "Have you said anything to Miss Meredith about it?"

"Oh! dear, no. I should never think of such a thing without consulting you first, as she is your guest. Indeed this is the

first time I have mentioned the matter at all, having only seen the advertisement this morning. And then, you know, as a sort of acknowledgment of the services which she has rendered during your illness, I am sure your papa would be delighted to meet any little incidental expenses which may be attendant upon the appointment; and she would have his name to fall back upon, and you might tell her that you should be quite glad to see her over here any time, when she felt she needed change. On the whole, my dear, I do not think there could be a more satisfactory arrangement."

"Well, Auntie Grisel, you shall do just as you like. I leave the matter entirely in your hands. As you say, it seems a very desirable opening."

"Yes; and as under present circumstances it does not seem advisable for her to pro-

long her visit, I think we may look upon it as providential. Then there is another thing which almost necessitates a change of this kind. Dr. Clay says you have now come to that stage of recovery when a little sea air would be very beneficial to you, and he suggests Brighton for us all."

"Hope included, of course," said Madolin. "I fancy if the question were put to him, he would say she needed it as much as any of us."

"Well, well," and Miss Griselda fumbled at her strips of knitting, "I do not consider that of very much importance. Girls at her age soon get over a little fatigue. Just consider, now, how much worse off she would have been, if for the last four months she had been at regular work of any kind. It would have told far more seriously upon her. The balance is really in her own favour; though when things are represented

in another light, it looks as if we had incurred an obligation ourselves. And then again, you know this appointment must be secured at once. I am quite sure Miss Meredith would not like to run the risk of losing it by going with us to the sea-side. Promptitude in such cases as these, is everything."

"And Uncle Mac?"

"Oh! I have taken that into consideration. He would go down with us himself. You know he says it is of no particular consequence to him just now where he is, so long as he has an hour or two for himself every day, which of course he could have just as well at Brighton as here; and then your dear papa would have the advantage of a gentleman's society, which you know makes all the difference when one has not one's regular occupations. I am sure Captain Cayley would be delighted."

"Except that he would say we were thrusting Hope out, when she needed rest as much as ourselves. You heard his remarks this afternoon."

"Well, my dear," said Miss Griselda, "I give it up. I am sure I have no selfish ends to gain. Things shall go on then just as they are."

"No, Auntie, you need not talk in that way. I was only looking at difficulties. As I said before, I leave it entirely in your own hands; you are a great deal cleverer at making arrangements than I am. Just do whatever you like, only don't let Uncle Mac think that we are a set of selfish, ungrateful people."

"My dear, he shall do nothing of the sort. Do you think I should be so impolitic? I have your authority, then, to speak to Miss Meredith on this subject?"

"You have."

“Then, as soon as she comes in, I shall mention it to her.”

“Very well ; only don’t do it when I am in the room. You know, I so dislike being present when arrangements are made, they confuse me so now. Catton shall bring a cup of tea into my room this afternoon, so you and Miss Meredith will be quite alone, as our gentlemen seem to look down with contempt upon five o’clock tea.”

“A very good suggestion. Now you have talked quite enough ; lie still and rest, whilst I take a little turn upon the terrace, and then I can tell you as soon as I see them coming. You will be good for nothing to-night unless you get a few minutes’ sleep.”

And triumphant Aunt Griselda went away. But no sleep came to Madolin. She had murdered sleep—ay, and everything else that could have brought peace

and rest to her life. For she was untrue to herself, and she knew it; and she was false to Hope, and she knew it; and she was trying to comfort herself by saying that Aunt Griselda had done it all—comfort which her keen, clear intellect ridiculed, whilst yet her self-love tried feebly to cling to it.

If she could only sweep out the last three months, since those Regisons came! But no!—she had begun, and she must go on.

CHAPTER VI.

THOSE last words spoken by Uncle Mac as they turned into the avenue had not sent Hope home with a very comfortable feeling. From sundry hints which Aunt Griselda dropped from time to time, she gathered that Capain Cayley had come over to England with a purpose, and the good lady had not scrupled to suggest in what direction that purpose lay. It might help to explain what puzzled her so in Miss Lauderdale's behaviour. Ever since that dinner-party at Rossbury a coldness had arisen between them. It had cut her

through and through, though as yet she had not been able to account for it. Since Captain Cayley's return, however, it had dawned upon her that she was looked at in the light of a possible rival; that she who had received so much kindness, was standing between her friend and what Miss Griselda considered the supreme object of a woman's life—a suitable settlement.

Then Hope, who had never seen Miss Lauderdale in the society of gentlemen before, who did not know how strong, almost passionate, was that craving for admiration and conquest which had been lying dormant for years within her, could not understand why she should undergo such a change in Uncle Mac's presence, unless there was something more than mere friendliness in her feeling for him. Hope knew little of the world; she judged others by herself. She could not under-

stand how a woman could care to win love simply for the triumph of flinging it from her. Madolin must care for Uncle Mac, or she would not smile upon him so sweetly. She must want very much to please him, else why should she spend such unusual thought upon her dress and appearance when he was in the house? She must yearn for his preference, else why should she seem vexed and offended if he did not wait upon her sufficiently, or if he paid attentions to anyone else?

And if so, what sort of faithfulness was she showing to her friend, that her heart had leave to beat now, as it did beat, at the remembrance of Mac's words? Mere words of kindness, perhaps; a pleasant way of telling her that he would be ready to help her at any time; and yet how she was lingering over them, feeding upon them, saying them over and over to herself as the

sweetest she had ever heard. Was this the way she showed her gratitude to one who had been very good to her, to steal away that which had never been intended for her, and to do it now, knowingly?

“I will end it,” said Hope to herself, flinging back her head with a pride which the proudest of the Lauderdale could not have overpassed. “I will go away and work for myself. I have done my duty here. I have nursed her back to life and health. I will go out again now, and do as my mother bade me. I will put as much into the world as I take out of it, and no one shall say of Hope Meredith that she eats the bread of idleness, or stays to win for herself a love which better belongs to another.”

“Ah! my dear, I was just looking out for you,” said Miss Griselda, as Hope, with head erect, and bright, flashing eyes, and a glow of maiden pride upon her face, came

up the avenue. "I began to wonder what had become of you. You seem to have enjoyed your walk very much, and so no wonder that you stayed long."

"Did Miss Lauderdale want me?"

"Oh! dear, no, nothing of the sort. She and I have been having a delightful little chat all to ourselves, and now I have sent her into her own room to have a sleep before Captain Cayley comes up to dinner. You know it is so very disappointing to him, when he comes up on purpose to see her, and finds her worn out, and unable to talk to him. Poor fellow, I can see he is dreadfully distressed about her, but I tell him he must be thankful she is spared to us at all. However, that was not what I wanted you to come back for. If you have nothing particular to attend to, perhaps you will stay with me a little while."

Hope sat down.

“There are just one or two little matters I want to talk to you about, and we so seldom have a chance of being quite alone. In the first place, I have thought for some time that I should like to express to you, on behalf of Sir David and my niece, as well as myself, how much we appreciate what you have done during our late affliction. You have been exceedingly kind and attentive to dear Madolin. Indeed, I think I may say——”

“Oh! no, Miss Griselda, please do not say anything. It was no more than I ought to have done. You know Miss Lauderdale has been very kind to me.”

“Certainly. I am glad you feel it so. But still anything in the world that Sir David could do now, as an acknowledgment of your services.”

Hope turned and looked Sir David's sister steadily in the face.

"They were not services. I took care of Miss Lauderdale because I loved her."

Miss Griselda was astonished. She had an idea that people in Miss Meredith's position only did that sort of thing for pay; at least, with a definite understanding that it would be made up to them in some way.

"Very kind of you, my dear; but you must allow us to look upon them in that light, if you please. I am sure no one could have been more attentive to poor dear Madolin, and I wished to take this opportunity of letting you know that you have our sincerest thanks. Indeed Sir David was only saying to me the other day that if circumstances should ever arise in which his name and influence could be of any use to you."

"Thank you," said Hope, rather proudly. "I don't think I should ever want to use them."

“Well, perhaps not. Still it is possible that at some future time such a reference might be useful to you in obtaining a situation. And that brings me to what I was so anxious to say to you. I was talking to my niece just now, whilst you were out; oh! and if you will excuse me, I should just like to mention to you that perhaps it would be advisable for you not to walk out quite so frequently with Captain Cayley. You know, my dear, there *are* little matters of etiquette which people of position——”

“Do you mean that Captain Cayley ought not to ask me to go out with him?” said Hope, straightforwardly. “I don’t think I ever proposed it. Perhaps you had better speak to him yourself, or shall I tell him you do not wish it?”

Miss Griselda had to draw back a little. This girl’s honesty and truthfulness were perfectly unmanageable. And she had such

an uncomfortable way of putting things as they were, instead of as they might have been.

“Oh! dear, no. I am quite sure your own good sense will tell you how to act in the matter. I simply hint that it is not advisable to allow yourself to become too intimate with a gentleman whose purposes are understood to be in another direction. However, I let that matter pass. I believe you a very simple and modest-minded person, and the merest hint on any matter of which you may be ignorant, is quite sufficient. But I wished to tell you about an advertisement which I have seen this morning in the Matchborough paper. It seems the lady superintendent of the hospital there is desirous of meeting with some one to assist her in her duties, preparatory, I daresay, to resigning the position altogether; so that it would be a very good opening. And know-

ing that your tastes were in that direction, I thought it scarcely kind not to mention the matter to you."

Hope's face brightened with a satisfaction which Miss Griselda neither expected nor understood. If she had sent for the girl to tell her that Captain Cayley had laid his heart at her feet, those brown eyes could not have shone with clearer, prouder content. Indeed she appeared so ready to enter this open door of self-help, that Miss Griselda thought she might afford to put a little check upon her eagerness.

"Not, my dear, that we wish to hurry your plans at all, though I may say that Dr. Clay has ordered poor dear Madolin to the sea-side as early as possible, and so we are all thinking of Brighton as just the place for her. Still a few days, you know, could make no difference ; we should not think of leaving whilst you were here, and any time

which you might require for consultation."

"Oh! I should not consult at all. If Miss Archer will have me, I will go."

"Very well said, my dear, very well said indeed; nothing pleases me so much in a young person as thorough decision of character. And I may perhaps say that it is important that you should take action at once, as I think the appointment is one which will be made immediately."

"Yes. I will see Dr. Clay and talk to him about it. I suppose a great deal rests in his hands. But first I must hear what Miss Lauderdale says."

And there flashed into her mind the memory of Madolin's pleading look three months ago, and the close caress and the whispered "Stay, Hope, stay." But now a voice stronger and sterner said, "Go."

"Of course, my dear, you would never

think of taking such a step without mentioning it to her. But I think she is far too unselfish to throw any obstacle in your way. Indeed she was only saying to me this afternoon, when I mentioned it to her, that she thought you could not do better than accept it at once. This going to the sea-side, you know——”

“I understand. Do you think Miss Lauderdale will let me talk to her about it now?”

“Oh! dear, yes. In fact she said she should be anxious to know your opinion on the matter. She seemed to think it just the thing for you, and urged me to speak to you about it, as she did not feel quite up to the mark herself. You will not perhaps stay too long with her, on account of the demand she will have upon her strength to-night. I should be so sorry for poor Captain Cayley to be disappointed again. Just a few minutes,

you know, will be quite enough to tell her that your decision is made."

Hope went away. There was something in her face Aunt Griselda could not quite understand. She thought the girl would have preferred holding on a little longer if possible, suggesting that perhaps Miss Lauderdale could not do without her; at any rate offering her services for that trip to the sea-side. Instead, she had accepted the opening so decidedly, seemed rather anxious in fact to get away and be doing something for herself. Curious, very curious! But Miss Griselda had always said there was something about Miss Meredith which she could not fathom.

CHAPTER. VII.

HOPE stayed in her own room a little while to think it over.

That Aunt Griselda should make an opening for her to leave the Chase, was easy to be understood. Hope knew well enough that she had never been more than tolerated by Sir David's majestic old sister. That it would be a good thing for her to begin at once the work of her life, before any new lights or shadows struck across its pathway, was also very clear. The sharp little pang which Aunt Griselda's hint about Uncle Mac had produced, showed her that more plainly

perhaps than she might have found it out for herself. But that Miss Lauderdale should make the first move in such a matter as her going away from Nunthorpe Chase, seemed strange.

Did they think—and Hope's cheeks burned—that she was planning other ways of earning a living, that she was trying to entrap Captain Cayley? For Miss Griselda's hint about the walks had seemed to point to such a suspicion. If so, her way was plain. She would go over that very day to Dr. Clay, have a talk with him about this place, get him to drive her over the next morning to Matchborough, and make all arrangements for her going at once to the hospital. Perhaps her work was done at the Chase. Perhaps the clarion call of duty, the only call which until now had ever smote upon her ear, sounded from the long wards of the Matchborough hospital,

called her to work there, not to rest here.

Hope thought of the little stream among the willow trees; the mossy trunk where she had sat fishing; that first sweet walk up the elm-tree avenue with Uncle Mac; their resting-place on the moorland hill; the last words he had spoken to her, would she like him to lean upon always? She seemed to hear them now, and felt again their strange happy thrill. But no; she had been deceiving herself. It was kindness, only kindness. Fool that she had been to let it stir a deeper feeling in her heart. Better go out to her work and forget and be content. And if they could do without her—

She went to Miss Lauderdale's room. Madolin was lying back in her easy-chair by the fire, sipping tea. She was expecting this visit from Hope, expecting and rather dreading it; for she had not yet so far conquered the nobler part of herself as to be

able, without a little chill of self-contempt, to play into Aunt Griselda's hands. There was no honesty at all in her life now, not even the honesty of despair.

"Well, Hope," she said, with an attempt at something like the old pleasantness. "Did you have an agreeable walk with Uncle Mac? He has not sent you home with a very smiling look upon your face. One would think you had been having some most important business to settle."

"And so I have," said Hope, ignoring the first part of the sentence altogether. "I have been talking to Miss Griselda, and she tells me they want some one to help them at the Matchborough hospital, and that you think I could not do better than go."

"Nay; I don't think she need have told you quite so much as that. She mentioned it to me this afternoon, and I only said it was the sort of thing you had been wishing

for. You know you always did say you should like to train for a nurse."

"Yes; and it is what I mean to do. I am glad Miss Griselda told me about it. I don't think she wishes me to stay here."

Once before Hope had said this, but then Madolin had caressed the unwelcome thought away. Was Miss Griselda the mistress of the Chase? Was it her part to decide who should go and who should stay there? But Madolin did not caress it away now. An expression of impatience and annoyance passed over her face—impatience at the net of conflicting interests which was drawing more and more tightly round her; annoyance at the part she was obliged to play in freeing herself from it. Why had she ever asked Hope to come to the Chase at all? Why had she ever looked with any sort of love and longing at the life which her coming had made possible? Better, far

better, never to know the best, than, knowing it, to turn back again to the worst. And even now the girl was looking into her face to find there the old tenderness, the old kindness, and they were gone.

“Well, you know, Hope,” she said, with a sort of proud apology, both for herself and Miss Griselda—“you know something would have had to be done some time, and perhaps it is well to make the change now, when there is such a good opening for you. Most people find it rather hard to get on with Auntie Grisel for long together. She has been accustomed always to have her own way.”

“Oh! yes, and she spoke very kindly indeed to me about it—I mean about the hospital, and said that if Sir David could do anything for me, and all that sort of thing, you know. But I don’t think I should need Sir David to do anything for me; Dr.

Clay's recommendation would be quite enough, and I am sure I should have that."

"Yes, I am sure you would," said Madolin, regretfully. How Hope's unconscious words seemed to plant a sting, every one of them, in her heart. "He has seen so much of you here, and knows how well you can do all that is needed. And really, Hope, I think it will be very nice for you. Not very far away from all of us. Not as if you had been going to London, quite out of reach. You know, whenever you want a mouthful of fresh air, we can send the carriage for you; and if you get tired and run down, you shall come here for a few days. And I don't suppose the duties will be so heavy either, as if you had gone to a London hospital."

"Oh! no, not at all heavy. It is only the feeling that you must be always there, ready for anything that may happen. And

I am not just so strong as I used to be. But I don't care for that. I shall be all right when I once really begin to work. I always think having nothing to do tires you more than anything else."

Another sting rankling in proud Madolin's heart. For was there not that trip to Brighton for them all in a fortnight; and who among them needed it more than poor little Hope? But she need not say anything about Brighton. Of course Aunt Griselda would not have been so foolish as to mention it. It might easily be made to appear, by-and-by, as if it had been arranged after this affair of the hospital had come up. Still she must say something about Hope's health.

"Yes, and you don't take quite care enough of yourself—you should not go for such long walks. You must have been out for a whole hour this afternoon, and it is

very tiring to walk with Uncle Mac. Men tear along so—they never seem to think what a struggle it is for us to keep up with them.”

“I shall not hurt myself any more in that way, then,” said Hope, sharply, “for I have taken my last walk with Captain Cayley, if the hospital comes to anything. I want to see Dr. Clay about it at once. Do you think Colin could drive me over there this afternoon? I should just have time before dinner.”

“Of course he could; and I know you will not give yourself any rest now until the whole matter is settled. You are dreadfully prompt, Hope, when you take a thing into your head. Do you remember, when we first talked about Tossie coming here, how you kept on at it until everything was done? Well, I did not keep you back then, and I will not keep you back now. But I think

you had better leave your visit to Dr. Clay until to-morrow. You shall go quite early in the morning, before he begins his rounds, and then perhaps he will drive you over to Matchborough himself, and you can see the lady superintendent. Don't let us talk any more about it now. If Aunt Griselda had not been here, perhaps——”

“But Aunt Griselda *is* here, and so we need not think what might have been. However, I don't care to talk, for I know what I am going to do. Shall I read to you a little while?”

“Thank you. We left off at number 119 of Shakespeare's Sonnets, before I began to be ill, and we have never taken them up since. I think I could enjoy them again now. Oh! what a long, long time ago it seems! And perhaps I shall not have you to read to me any more. Hope, should you not really like to stay with us?”

Madolin knew well enough that, Hope's course once clearly marked out before her, she would keep to it; and so she was able to comfort her own heart a little by expressing a regret for what was not likely now to be altered, and making a show of willingness to retain what she was really glad to lose. Hope's reply did not comfort her very much.

"Of course I should like to stay with you. We settled that a long time ago. But things have made it very different now. It is better that I should go. I do not quite feel that we belong to each other as we did once. You will live just as well without me now, and I shall be doing my own work somewhere else."

"But supposing, Hope——"

"I never suppose anything. I take things as they are. Here is our mark. Yes, it

does seem a long, long time since we left off here."

And Hope read :—

"What potions have I drunk of Siren tears,
Distill'd from limbecks foul as hell within,
Applying fears to hopes, and hopes to fears,
Still losing when I saw myself to win ;
What wretched errors hath my heart committed,
Whilst it hath thought itself so blessed never !
How have mine eyes out of their spheres been fitted,
In the distraction of this madding fever !
O benefit of ill ! now I find true
That better is by evil still made better ;
And ruined love, when it is built anew,
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.
So I return rebuked to my content,
And gain by ill thrice more than I have spent."

What more than a poem, read again in some fresh mood of thought, brings back the exact mental state of its first reading? Madolin listened, and the past returned. Once more she was looking to the light, looking with Hope for her guide and friend. Once more the tender longings after a sweet new life returned, but only as memories.

Herself arose before her, as she had been then, as she could never be again—no, never again, for there was no going back. Oh! for that past to be present, and another beginning possible for her. Oh! for the old brooding pain, that upon it there might be the touch of a true heart, the heart she had flung from her for ever! Oh! for even bitterness and sorrow, which had yet no sting of falseness in them! But no. She had set out afresh upon a new life. She would follow it to the end.

“Thank you, Hope. I will not trouble you for any more. It does not sound so pleasant now. Ring the bell, please, for Catton. I suppose it is time for us to dress.”

Then came dinner, then came coffee, then came whist, Aunt Griselda being Hope's partner, and scolding her for not paying more attention to the game. And Madolin

was brilliant again in powdered hair and silver ornaments, and drooping crimson flowers over the whiteness of her neck and bosom ; and brightly as ever she smiled upon Uncle Mac, and with as pretty an air of command she kept him at her side. For when one has lost much, one must take better care of the little that remains.

CHAPTER VIII.

AUNT GRISELDA could manage matters as well as most people when she gave her mind to it. She managed them so to-night that, after whist, Hope had to stay by her side, sorting out a quantity of wools into shades, whilst Madolin had Uncle Mac all to herself in the bay window, and Sir David nodded in his chair.

Poor old Sir David was becoming rather shaky and infirm. The doctors began to hint at a "breaking up" in his constitution, and cautioned him against the least excitement or over-exertion. People who were living

with him from day to day saw little change, but those who met him after weeks of absence noticed the dying out in his face of the pride and vigour of the Lauderdale race. There was a vacant, bewildered look sometimes in his once keen grey eyes. He did not care to talk ; he would sit for hours together silent, self-absorbed. He left more and more of the active management of his affairs to others. He was talking about having a secretary to attend to his correspondence. Mac had instructions to look out for one, and was to help in arranging papers and looking over accounts before he went away. In a word, Sir David was becoming, as his friends remarked, quite the old man.

Mac hinted as much to Aunt Griselda, and then she could see it plainly enough herself, and it sharpened her anxiety for Madolin to make a speedy settlement in

life. And what settlement so suitable as Uncle Mac? Her niece seemed quite willing to be pleased with him, and if he did not respond with such eagerness as could be wished, that was only because just at first he failed to see the great favour which was being extended to him. Matters could not help being all right by-and-by, if Madolin kept on being so bright and fascinating; and now that there was a fair prospect of that troublesome Miss Meredith being got out of the way, the engagement was only a question of time.

Nothing was said that night about Brighton, nor about Hope's plans for the next day. Indeed, the poor girl seemed under a cloud. She easily took on the chill of an ungenial atmosphere. With all her honest unselfishness, she was very sensitive to the least change of condition in the mental atmosphere of those about her. It

needed much love to make her happy. It needed but little diminution in that love to force her back again to her natural quietness.

Madolin saw her discomfiture, and it seemed to give keenness to her own desire for supremacy. Another motive was stirring at her heart now, too. At first she had only set herself to conquer Uncle Mac as an amusement. She wanted to bring him to her feet, in order that she might have the pleasure of sending him away, as she had sent away so many others in the days of her youth. Now he was beginning to exert a little influence over herself. His apparent indifference was stinging her into interest, as Jetsam's had once done. He was too utterly guileless and self-unconscious to be worked upon by a nature like hers; he had no vanity to be flattered by her preference, no craving after power to be

fed by submission won from her. But that very independence made him perilous to a woman who loved victory all the more because there was danger in the fight.

Madolin might have known how much danger, but she never paused to think of that. Indeed she thought of nothing now save the excitement of the game into which she was plunging. In her moments of reflection she hated herself. Therefore she would not allow any moments of reflection. Only by strangling the past and resolutely turning away from the future could she play her part in the present. She was like some one running violently down a steep incline towards a precipice. She could neither stop now nor turn back ; and yet she knew the precipice was there. And the worst anguish of all was, to remember the pathway at the top, safe, but so narrow, into which Hope's hand would once have guided her.

Hope did go over next morning to the village, and she had a long talk with Dr. Clay, which ended in his driving her to Matchborough himself, to see the lady superintendent of the hospital, and the governors who were that morning assembling in their weekly committee. Hope needed no testimonials, no recommendations. The work which she had already done, spoke for her. The appointment was given to her at once, and she came away with the understanding that she was to enter upon her duties as soon as possible.

That could not be too soon. There was a certain quiet pride in her, which kept her from receiving where she could not give. She was a guest now at Nunthorpe Chase, only a guest, with no roots striking down into the heart of the home. How or why this change had come she could not tell. There was no sting in it for her, for she had

done no wrong, but it made her a stranger where once she had been a friend. Why should she linger then, to go forth to the work which had come like God's messenger to meet her?

Dr. Clay set her down at the lodge gates. She would not be driven up to the house, for she wanted a little quiet time to think over what she had done. But she was not to have that quiet time. Uncle Mac, with a couple of Chase dogs after him, was shouldering along with his gun towards the moorland. Hearing him, she turned down one of the side paths, but Mac was not going to let her escape him in that way.

Neither were Tyke and Leppo, who came springing upon her for their accustomed caress. She stooped to let them lick her hands and face. They at least would miss her, if no one else did.

"It is too bad of you to shoot off like

this, Hope," Mac said. "If I had known you wanted to go down to the village I could have driven you there myself. Madolin never told me you were gone, until it was too late."

"Yes; but I wanted to go to Matchborough too, and you could not have taken me there."

"Yes, I could. I could have taken you wherever you liked, the farther the better; because then we should have been longer on the road. Madolin did not tell me you were going so far as that. She has been making me walk up and down the terrace with her amongst the peacocks and spaniels until I feel as stiff as a footman, and so I came along here with the dogs to have a stretch. But what in the world have you been doing at Matchborough? You said nothing about it last night. Did you know then?"

"Well, yes; I did, in a sort of way.

After I came in from my walk yesterday, Miss Griselda told me about an advertisement which she had seen in the paper. They want an assistant for the superintendent of the Matchborough hospital, and she thought it would be a very nice place for me. So I went to see Dr. Clay about it, and he has been with me to Matchborough, and we have settled it."

"Confound Miss Griselda!" said Mac. "You need not look so astonished. I have the authority of the National Anthem for going as far as that. If I said what I thought, and if you were not here to listen, I should perhaps go a little farther. But you don't really mean to say you are going?"

"Yes, and as soon as possible; as soon as Miss Lauderdale can spare me."

"As soon as Miss Griselda can spare you, you mean, and that time has been any time

since she came into the house. I can see just so far into a stone wall and no farther. But Miss Lauderdale—Madolin, I mean, will never let you go.”

“Oh! yes, she will. Miss Lauderdale thinks it will be the very thing for me.”

“The very thing for you! After you have been nursing her from death’s door, and making yourself look almost like a ghost in doing it. Why, I thought it was Madolin who would not hear of your going to London three months ago, because you were not strong enough for it; and now she talks of sending you to Matchborough, to take care of other people, when you want to be taken care of yourself a great deal more. I’ll go right off and tell her what I think of it.”

“No, you won’t do anything of the sort. I am old enough to know what is good for me, and I am sure I could not do a better thing in all the world than go to that hos-

pital and work as hard as I can from morning to night. I am doing no good here now."

"You are, you are making people happy."

"No, I am not. I think it is rather the other way. Besides, I like a sort of work where I can see what I am doing. If a burnt child comes to me, shrieking with pain, and I can dress it and soothe it and send it away with the tears changed to smiles, I shall feel I have done something—that is the sort of work I want to do now."

Hope was talking fast and eagerly, to keep back the tears which, now that the Rubicon of her fate had been passed, would keep forcing themselves dangerously near. There had been sweet days for her in that old home of late, very bright days, the brightest she had ever known, and now

she must go away. Truly it was a little hard.

Tyke saw that something was the matter, and thrust his muzzle into her hand with a mute sympathy which was the best he could give. That was just the drop too much in her overfull cup. The tears did come splashing down now in good earnest. Hope bent over the dog to hide them, and pretended to busy herself in rubbing some marks from his brass collar. Mac could not bear that sort of thing. He pushed Tyke away, and took her hand himself, wet with tears.

"I have a better right to it than the dog has. Hope, you shall not go away like this. There is something wrong somewhere. It's that stupid old Miss Griselda—she's always putting her foot in somewhere and spoiling everything. You don't want to go, and there's no need for you to go."

"Yes, I do want to go, and I must go,

and I shall go," said Hope, impetuously, half pushing the hand away which was holding hers—out of kindness—mere kindness, of course, nothing more than that. "How can I stay in a place where they do not want me? Miss Lauderdale herself suggests that I should go."

"Miss Lauderdale does nothing of the sort. I don't believe she could be so cruel as to let you go away now. It's all Miss Griselda. I wish she was at the bottom of the sea, or else having muffin worries in her musty old London lodgings—anything but coming here and turning everything into gall and vinegar. And you never answered that question, Hope, that I asked you yesterday afternoon, when you started off in such a hurry."

"What question?" said Hope, with a glow in her cheeks which dried up the tears as fast as they fell.

“I asked you if you would like me for a crutch to lean upon always, and you would not tell me. Tell me now. I won’t let you go away until you do tell me.”

Hope felt as if she were stealing something that did not belong to her. Of course she was. Had not Miss Griselda told her as much? And what business had Mac to talk to her in that way? If he only meant that he would be glad to help her, why did he not put it so, and say something straightforward about recommendations and testimonials? She should know, then, what to say.

“Let me go!”—and quickly she flashed her face away from him—“it is the only thing I can do,—to go away.”

“No, it is not the only thing you can do. What’s the use of talking about your duty? Perhaps your duty is a great deal nearer to you than you think it is. Hope, why can’t

you say something better than this to a fellow?"

Hope turned her face a little.

"Captain Cayley, don't make it harder for me than it really is. I have been very happy here, and now I must go away. Going away is the only thing I can see plainly, but I can see that very plainly. Good-bye." And she went slowly away from him.

Uncle Mac did not call her back again. She must please herself. He did not understand women's ways. Something was wrong somewhere, if only he could find it out. Yesterday he felt almost sure that she cared for him a little. He had not quite given up thinking so, even now. And yet, if she did, she might have known that her being poor could not make a bit of difference. He would have worked for her himself, and taken care of her, and made every-

thing so bright and pleasant. And yet, instead, here she was, insisting upon going away, just to indulge her own foolish ideas of independence. It was too bad !

“ Well, if you will, you must,” he said to himself, whistling up his dogs and setting off again towards the moors.

CHAPTER IX.

BUT perhaps Hope's determinate turning away from him made Uncle Mac a little more willing to respond to the advances of Miss Lauderdale, who was in one of her most brilliant moods that evening.

A man must be exceptionally high-minded who can receive, without a flush of gratified pride, the preference of a beautiful and fascinating woman, especially if she is one more accustomed to be obeyed than to obey, and if the girl upon whom he would have smiled has coldly given him back to himself. And then Madolin was just so much of an

invalid as to require attention. He might offer without any falseness those little services and ministrations with which a strong man loves to surround a weak woman. And though Mac was far too true-hearted to pretend what he did not feel, still, Hope's repulse that morning made him have just a little touch of satisfaction in letting her see that, if she did not care for his preference, some one else did.

Mac might be pardoned for it; because, all the time, if Hope would but once have smiled upon him, if she would but have looked towards him with eyes that had a touch of questioning and regret in them, he would have been at her side directly, and have made everything straight. But no; there she sat at Miss Griselda's elbow, scoring cribbage marks, never so much as turning or looking in the direction of the bay-window, where Madolin, smiling and

sweet-eyed, was taking post after post of the enemy's ground.

“She does not care,” thought Uncle Mac.
“So that is a woman's way!”

Poor Hope! And her warm little heart was breaking all the time, for its load of pain and weariness. She had vexed Mac, she had turned his heart away from her. She dare not even say that she was sorry; for what right had she to take what belonged to another? Well; this would make it so much easier for her to go away from the Chase. No need now to give herself much time for preparation. Everybody seemed ready for her to go. Aunt Griselda had praised her alacrity and spirit in settling the matter at once, not letting it slip through her fingers, as many girls would have done, whilst they were making up their minds. Aunt Griselda liked promptitude. There was nothing, she said, which commanded

her respect so much. And she really did think, though of course they should miss dear Miss Meredith very much, that perhaps it would be better for her to enter upon the duties of her new sphere at once, before she had time to get frightened by thinking too much about them.

And she had spoken to Sir David, and the carriage would be ready next morning. And if, in consequence of Miss Meredith's early departure, there were any little matters which she had not time to arrange, she could come over whenever she liked and make everything straight.

Thus Miss Griselda, as she bade Hope a kind good night; and then she despatched Colin with orders for Bowles the coachman.

Neither did Miss Lauderdale herself protest against Hope's sudden departure. Her silence might arise either from indifference or wounded friendship.

“Of course you will come over to see us very often,” she said next morning, as Hope went about the room, collecting her little belongings. “You know, if you will only send us word, Bowles can come for you whenever you like. You will not be always at work.”

“Not always; but I do mean to be very industrious. I don’t mean to let myself think about coming to Nunthorpe at all. You know, I am not likely to settle down very heartily to my work if I am always promising myself a visit to the Chase when I feel idle. No; I will give myself to it altogether.”

“Very praiseworthy of you, my dear,” said Aunt Griselda, briskly. “There is nothing like being a whole person to one thing at a time. Madolin, I don’t think you ought to press Miss Meredith to come over very often, just at first; you know it is sure to unsettle her before she has got completely

into harness. It sounds kindly, and I have no doubt you mean it so, but in reality it is not. Keep to what you are doing, Miss Meredith, and when you have become so interested in it that it is really the business of your life, you will be able to leave it from time to time with impunity."

Wise Aunt Griselda! How perfectly she always knew what was the best thing for other people to do!

And Hope went away to pack up her things. She was to be driven over to Matchborough that very afternoon.

Soon after she left the room, Mac came in with a basket of ferns and flowers, all hot-house flowers except a few stalks of forget-me-not.

"Has Miss Meredith gone?"

"No," said Madolin, "I believe she has gone to do some more packing."

"Give her these flowers then, will you ;

and say I brought them for her? The forget-me-nots came from the little brook, among the willows. If she does not care for them herself, I daresay some of the hospital patients will be glad enough of them. Poor wretches! they do not often see anything pretty. And say good-bye to her for me. I am going to ride over to Rossbury, to look after my guns. She will be coming over again very soon, of course."

"Oh! dear, yes," said Miss Griselda, shifting her ground to suit circumstances. "This is nothing of a good-bye. Madolin has just been telling her that, whenever she likes, Bowles shall take the carriage over for her. Next Sunday perhaps."

"Oh! then it's all right; you'll tell her about the flowers, Madolin, and that the forget-me-nots are from the brook, and the ferns will keep almost any time, if she puts them under a shade. And say that I was

obliged to go to Rossbury, so that I could not say good-bye to her."

And Mac went away. Only until next Sunday. That was no time at all. Perhaps by then she would be feeling a little more kindly to him. Perhaps she would have begun to find that the work was rather harder than she expected, and she might be sorry for turning him away in that cool manner. Perhaps it was a good thing, too, that he did not say good-bye, for she would see that he was a little bit vexed, just a little bit, and independent too, as well as herself. And then Madolin would tell her about the flowers, to show that he had not quite forgotten her. Some people were better for being let alone.

"Uncle Mac seems to be remarkably well acquainted with Miss Meredith's tastes," said Madolin, sharply, as she turned over the delicate fragrant flowers, and plumes of

maiden hair. *We* never have such exquisite things brought in for the table. It seems to wound the gardener's very heart to cut us so much as a single spray of this. I have asked for it over and over again, and something else is sure to be sent up."

And Madolin flung a fern-leaf out upon the table.

"Ah! well, my dear, it is well to have a friend at court. I have no doubt Miss Meredith has been dropping a hint in that direction. People with those pretty innocent ways can do anything of that sort, and don't seem to think it at all unladylike. However, as Mac says, they will be nice for the patients.

Madolin turned them over again. He had brought for Hope the sweetest flowers he could find. He had never brought any for her. A sharp pang of jealousy struck through her. She clutched the tender stalks.

It was like wounding an enemy to feel their life-blood moistening her fingers. And forget-me-nots, too, Mac's gift to Hope, and she wanted Mac at *her* feet. What was there left in her life now but to conquer? And even that would soon be gone. She was no longer young. Then she would no longer be beautiful. Her hard, bitter life was telling its story in her face already, spite of Mrs. Regison's flattering tongue. That one horrible mistake which stood between her and all a woman's heritage of love, was grinding the fairness and sweetness out of her. Looking on a few years more, she could see herself withered, forsaken, forgotten. Should she not take what she could then, while yet there was time? Was her power so far gone, that a girl like Hope Meredith could stand in her way, could outplay her in the game of conquest? Nay, never!

And Madolin bit through the stalk of a sweet forget-me-not, and flung it from her, bruised and broken. So would she deal with anyone who crossed her path. So would she deal with Hope.

Aunt Griselda went out upon the terrace to feed the peacocks. Madolin turned the flowers over and over, pinching little wounds here and there in the soft geranium leaves, crushing the life and perfume out of a stray jasmine blossom. And if evil thoughts could wither it, surely not one of the fair pretty things should have had either fairness or beauty left. Whilst she was bending over them Hope came in.

“Oh! what beautiful flowers!” she cried, kneeling down at the table. “You darlings! Where did you come from?”

“Mac brought them,” said Madolin, carelessly. “I think the gardener must have wanted the houses thinned. They often cut

off a great many at this time of the year. He thought they might perhaps be nice for some of the hospital patients, so you can take them, if you like."

"What a kind gardener!" said Hope. "They will be such a treat to the poor people."

That was well. Madolin had not told a lie. If Hope misunderstood, that was her own fault. And besides, the flowers were not Mac's to give. She herself had the best right to say what should be done with them. And she had given Mac's message in a sort of way, because he had said they would do for the patients.

"And he wished me to say good-bye to you," she continued. "He has gone out, and will not be home until after you have left. I told him you were about somewhere in the house, but he would not wait; you know he is not a man who cares much

for appearances. Besides, you will be sure to see him when you come over again. Shall I give him any message?"

"Only that I am sorry not to say good-bye to him. I don't think there is anything else. Miss Lauderdale, are you sorry I am going away?"

"You foolish child!" and Madolin, with a desperate effort, made herself draw Hope a little nearer. "Of course I am very sorry; but why should I always be saying it? And then, you know, you chose it yourself. It would have been very pleasant if you could have kept on staying with us, but we must be content. I shall learn to do without you; I have learned to do without many things already."

"But not to be happy without them."

"Well, no, not that exactly; but it is no use talking about happiness. And then, you know, one has such different moods,

Now when you first came here, I was in a very restless mood, and you did me good, and it was very kind of you to stay."

"And now you are not in a restless mood, and it is very kind of me to go away."

"No, not that. But things seem to have got mixed up lately, and we cannot go on quietly, as we used to do. I suppose people never can keep going on quietly—at least, I never can. But I hope you will be very happy."

"I?—oh, yes, I mean to be very happy indeed," and Hope laughed merrily. "I am always happy when I have plenty of work. You will see me some of these days with a face like a full moon. Don't be afraid of my happiness."

"And I wish to thank you, Hope, for being so kind to me when I was ill. And I can trust you?"

“Miss Lauderdale,” and Hope drew herself away, “you ought not to have said that. It is not well. If I do not quite belong to yourselves, I am a lady still.”

“I beg your pardon. Yes, you are a true-hearted little girl, and do come to see us whenever you like, and if you want anything, do not be afraid to ask us. You know papa will always be delighted to do anything for you. I think now I ought to go to Aunt Griselda. She is out on the terrace by herself.”

And Madolin, glad to end the interview, turned away. Hope took the flowers to her own room, but she laid the forget-me-nots in her Bible.

“I know where they came from,” she said to herself; “but how did the gardener find out I wanted them? Perhaps Tossie told him I liked them.”

And then, after a pause,

“So Uncle Mac went away without saying good-bye to me!”

CHAPTER X.

BUT Madolin did not go to Aunt Griselda. She stayed where Hope had left her in the dining-room, scalding tears, the last protest of her better self against its slow, deliberate murder, stealing down her face.

For, scarcely four months ago, when the February snowdrops were whitening those terrace beds, Hope had come to her, the har-binger, like them, of brighter days at hand. And she had taken the girl into her heart, and cherished her there, and it had seemed as if life might, even yet, have some good

purpose in it; and rest, if not peace, end the long bitterness of her womanhood. And Hope had been true to her; Hope had never failed. The falseness was all her own.

Was there, then, no going back? Yes. A faint, far-off voice seemed to say that the past was not quite past. She might yet turn and break the cords which her own hands were strengthening. No power was upon her which her strong will could not bid away. Life was only what it had been for many and many a year—a dark, straight path, with a grave at its entrance and another at its ending. That fateful secret of hers, which could neither be mended nor altered, had sunk almost out of sight. Some day it might face her again, or it might not. It stood between her and all possible joy, but it did not stand between her and all possible nobleness. Hope had

shown her the better way, why not call the girl back again? Why not stoop her proud neck to bear the burden of gratitude which some women would carry so easily? And though Hope knew much, she did not know all, and what she knew was safe.

Safe now! But how if she stayed at the Chase and wound herself round Mac's heart and married him? She would tell him everything. Wives always told their husbands. Of course it was the proper thing that they should do so; nobody blamed them for it. And then the people would know, and the people would suspect, and the people would have power over her.

No; Hope Meredith and Uncle Mac must be kept apart. That was her only way of safety. She could not win him for herself. The golden gates of Love's paradise were for ever shut against her; but she could keep him from loving her enemy, the

woman whom she hated. And she would do it; call it selfish, call it cruel, call it mean—she would do it, for how else could she be at peace?

And Madolin clutched a little fern leaf which had dropped at her feet, and ground it between her white teeth, and then she amused herself by stroking the tiger skin which lay upon the couch, and putting her fingers in its half-open mouth. Perhaps the thing had done some mischief in its time, for all it lay so still and quiet now. Perhaps many a poor little innocent life had gone to feed its cruel hunger before its own life had been shot away to feed the pomp of great people like herself, who must have such things for their service. Well, it did its work, and so did the creatures it had killed, and so did everything else in this great, weary, suffering world. And why should she be sorry?

That afternoon Hope went away from Nunthorpe Chase.

The Brighton plan could be talked over now; and Aunt Griselda did talk it over, accordingly, as they sipped their coffee after dinner, Mac being one of the party.

It was arranged that they should start as early as possible, and he was to go with them,—“Because,” as Aunt Griselda said, “it would be so much more pleasant for you, dear Sir David, to have company.”

Indeed, his health was such now that it would scarcely have been kind to have taken him away from his own home without some gentleman to supply him with a little companionship; and of course Mac could have his own sitting-room, and look after his business-matters just as well at Brighton as anywhere else, so that everything fitted in conveniently enough.

Besides, though Aunt Griselda did not

say *that*, it would have been a most impolitic thing to have left the Canadian captain in those snug little lodgings down at the village. For who could tell how often he might take it into his head to drive over to Matchborough, and inquire how Miss Meredith was getting on in the midst of her new duties? Or what more likely that she, designing little creature as she had proved herself to be, should make an excuse for coming to the Chase to look after something which she had left there, and so manage to get a walk across the park with Captain Cayley, or a pleasant little *tête-à-tête* with him by the stream among the willow-trees. And everyone knew how easily those honest, unsuspecting men were caught by a little judicious flattery. But with the Chase shut up, and the lodgings shut up too, and Hope busy in those great hospital wards, and Uncle Mac and dear Madolin sauntering

about at their own sweet will upon the Brighton beach, there was every prospect that matters would be brought to a successful issue.

Of course that was what Madolin meant, Aunt Griselda said to herself, as she knitted vigorously on after the sea-trip had been arranged. She had never taken so much trouble to please anyone before, never received attentions so courteously. Indeed, there was at times a shade of pensiveness in her manners which argued a most satisfactory state of mind. Her heart certainly must be touched. She was becoming fitful in her temper, restless, wayward, often sad. All that could only mean that some one at last was beginning to exert an influence upon her, and Aunt Griselda devoutly hoped that everything would soon be right.

There could not be anything more desirable. Mac would of course give up that

foreign appointment, get something under Government at home, have his establishment in London, and let dear Madolin take her proper place in society. Sir David would then want some one to sit at the head of his table, and talk to him, and amuse him, and watch over his rapidly-declining health; and who so suitable for all this as herself? It would be the most delightful thing in the world, if only the young people would make haste and settle their own affairs. Madolin must not tease him too much, not want to be too despotic. It was a pity she had such a love of power. It must have come to her from her poor mother, for the Lauderdale women, though as beautiful as any in all the country round, had never had the reputation of being flirts.

So another week saw the Chase people comfortably settled down at Brighton, and things went on very pleasantly. The car-

riages and horses had been brought, there were drives up and down the long promenade, and canters on the beach, and boating excursions, in which Madolin, in her yachting costume of blue and white, looked perfectly bewitching, and behaved so sweetly, and smiled so graciously, that Aunt Griselda thought there must really be an understanding of some sort, though Sir David had not yet been formally spoken to about it. When there was, she intended to write to the Regisons, and get them down for a few days, because then of course the young people would need to be left a little more to themselves, and she should require society, poor dear Sir David being nothing at all now in the way of amusement.

Though she must say she could not quite understand Mac. He certainly was not so assiduous as he might have been. He seemed to like just as well to be poking

about on the beach for pebbles, or holding conversations with the brown-capped, bare-legged fishermen, as escorting his graceful cousin about to the various gaieties of the town. And why he should have so much more business to attend to at Brighton than at the Chase; and why he should be so constantly shutting himself up in his own sitting-room under the pretext of attending to his foreign correspondence, when at Nunthorpe he was always ready for a stroll in the park with Hope Meredith; and why there should so often be that pre-occupied, anxious look upon his face, when only a few days ago he had been as bright and brisk as a bee—was more than she could understand.

Business worries, most likely, and perhaps a little forecasting about ways and means. Because poor Mac had never been considered a very thrifty, managing sort of man; honest,

noble-hearted, true as the day, but not one to get money and lay it up. And now, perhaps, with his new prospects, and the responsibilities of married life dawning upon him, he was beginning to wish that things had been otherwise.

CHAPTER XI.

BUT as the days went on, and the assid-
uities did not increase, a bright
thought came into dear Aunt Griselda's
head.

A rich old gentleman, a retired Indian
officer, who had known a little of Sir David
during the three years of his bachelor re-
tirement in London, was living now in
handsome apartments on the other side of
the square, and had manifested a desire to
renew his acquaintance; drawn thereto, Miss
Griselda doubted not, by the graceful man-
ners and appearance of her niece, though of

course Madolin had never in the slightest degree acknowledged his admiration. Now, if a pleasant intimacy could be established between them ; if Colonel Dewar would get into the habit of coming across occasionally of an evening for whist or cribbage, or a chat with Sir David ; and if he and Madolin could be thrown together in an apparently confidential way, so as to give the appearance of intentions on his part, perhaps wavering Uncle Mac would be brought to the point. When once he had a suspicion that the prize was being snatched from his hands, he would surely make an effort to secure it for himself.

Aunt Griselda had known that sort of thing succeed once before with a friend of her own who wished to bring a somewhat tardy lover to her feet ; and perhaps the charm had not entirely lost its power. So the Colonel was invited across for a quiet rub-

ber, in which Madolin was his partner ; and she, in no wise unwilling to inflict a little pain upon innocent Uncle Mac, was so brilliant and agreeable that the old gentleman lingered and loitered, and gladly accepted Sir David's proposal to supply his place in the next morning's drive ; and then found an excuse for looking in again with some photographs, and, on the whole, played into Miss Griselda's hands so satisfactorily that, if Mac had any intentions at all, he must really now come to the point and say what they were.

But Mac, utterly unconscious of the snares which were being laid for him, went quietly on his way with many a tender thought for little Hope, toiling patiently on at Matchborough in the work she had chosen for herself. He had heard nothing of her, not even a word of thanks for his flowers, nor the farewell which he had given through

Madolin; and yet she lived in his heart. Something told him that everything was not quite right, that the girl had not gone away out of her own free will; and so he hoped and waited, sure that one day it would all explain itself.

If Miss Griselda could only have known how many hours he spent in that little sitting-room of his, dreaming and building castles in the air; if she could only have known what visions, chasing one another through his mind, caused him to make such provoking mistakes at whist, or to sit opposite Madolin in their little pleasure-boat with such a far-off, wistful look in those honest eyes of his—but Aunt Griselda never did know.

Perhaps Madolin did; at least her quicker, keener instinct guessed at the truth, and that was why a strange feeling began to quiver in her heart against the man whom she had

failed to conquer. He had been indifferent to her, and by that very indifference, won dangerous submission from a nature which must either rule or be ruled. At first she cared not at all. Then came the desire of power; then came jealousy, quickening that desire into thirst; then came wounded pride, fanning it into passion. Only God and herself knew the sore battle which had raged in her heart, as through many and many a night she sat at the window, looking out upon the long reaches of wave and sand. For the Lauderdales were a proud race, and her father's honour pierced granite-like through the earthier clay of her mother's passion. She might suffer, she might struggle, she might wrong, she might die, but Madolin would never let the world's finger point to a stain on the grand old name she bore. And since he would not own her power, and since she might not follow her heart and love

him as she had loved none other before, she would hate him, and hate the feeble girl who had won him from her; hate them quietly, hate them silently, but hate them with an intensity which must sooner or later find room to do its will.

So that Aunt Griselda might most likely have to wait some time before those dear Regisons could be asked down to join her at Brighton.

Meanwhile the Colonel availed himself of every opportunity of coming across. Generally of an evening he came in for a rubber. More than once he had taken Sir David's place in the carriage, apparently not at all to Mac's discomfiture; though if that tardy young man had been possessed of the slightest penetration, Aunt Griselda thought he must surely have suspected what brought Colonel Dewar so frequently to the house.

But Griselda had long patience. Some-

thing might be gained after all. Who knew, if the Colonel failed to bring Mac to the point, but he might come to it himself, not with Madolin certainly, who behaved in a most capricious manner to him, but with herself? For she must say he was a most pleasant, attentive old gentleman, equal to any of the *Pension* people in his solicitude for her and her strips of knitting ; and the air of Brighton suited her health admirably, in fact it almost made her feel young again, and she did not think she should at all object to making the place her home.

Excellent Miss Griselda !

It was one sunny afternoon, and Madolin had proposed that instead of driving up and down the promenade, which was crowded now with fashionable people, they should go lower down on the beach and sit on the shady side of one of the little yachts, and watch the tide come in. Colonel Dewar

was with them, so was Mac; and even Sir David, muffled up in wraps and comforters, had allowed himself to be beguiled from his customary chair on the promenade, and settled down on a couch extemporised by Mac out of sail cloths, and carriage rugs, within sight of the pleasant splash of the waves.

“Buy a few nice shells, ma’am,” said a woman, thrusting her basket under Miss Griselda’s umbrella.

“No, thank you,” said that lady with dignified courtesy.

Scarcely had the shell vendor taken her departure, when a couple of girls came up.

“Beautiful pebbles, ma’am; sell you your pick among ’em for sixpence.”

“And oranges, ma’am, two for three-halfpence—here’s one cut in half, so as you may see they aren’t boiled; taste ’em and try ’em before you buy ’em.”

The idea of a scion of the Lauderdale house buying oranges on the beach at Brighton!

"No, thank you, my good woman; we do not require anything."

"Want a bit of pretty edging, miss?" and half-a-dozen yards of twopenny tawdriness were flaunted in Madolin's face.

But Madolin did not reply, only lowered her large white parasol.

"My dear, this is becoming a nuisance," said poor Aunt Griselda, who had never tried sitting on Brighton beach before in summer-time. "Don't you think we had better retire out of the reach of these impudent people? They might have sense enough to see that we are not likely to patronize them."

"Oh! never mind, auntie. I think it is rather amusing than otherwise. It does us

no harm to look at their things. That man has some pretty carved ivory frames. I wonder what they cost?"

The man, seeing her glance directed towards his basket, came forward, and so did another man with telescopes. Madolin bought a frame, the most imprudent thing she could have done, for a shoal of people surrounded her as soon as she had made the purchase—more women with oranges, more with laces, more with shell pin-cushions, more with pebbles, more with collections of seaweed.

"Buy a telescope, ma'am—carry as far as your eye can reach," and the man, lowering himself until his face was on a level with Miss Griselda's, would fain have initiated her into the art of handling his precious instruments.

"Now, ma'am, if you *would* allow me," and drawing out the tube, he was in the

very act of applying it to the Lauderdale eyes.

But that was too much. Position has its privileges, and one of them is certainly that of being free from the intrusion of the lower classes.

“My good man, we do *not* want any of your wares. Go away directly, and tell the other people that we do not want to be interrupted.”

Which the man did, and various little explosions of laughter were the consequence.

“Oh! come,” said Uncle Mac, “this is rather too much of a good thing; and yonder is a photographer, who has been looking at us for the last ten minutes. He will be here directly, offering to take the whole of us for sixpence. I propose, Miss Lauderdale, that next time you bring your friends to sit upon the beach, you shall

furnish us with a gigantic '*No, thank you,*' each, printed in large letters, to stick upon our umbrellas. It will save us such a great deal of trouble. Shall we take a boat and go out to Hove?"

"No," said Madolin, haughtily; for though she was tired enough of the people with their baskets, she was far too proud to agree to anything which Mac might propose. "I am content, and shall remain here. Unless," and she looked with a fascinating smile towards the old gentleman on her other side—"unless Colonel Dewar is tired. Of course, if you are, I shall be delighted to move."

In turning she revealed her profile to the photographer, who had been watching them so attentively—a very lovely profile, clear, distinct, exquisitely chiselled. No wonder that the man looked keenly at it—no wonder that, a moment or two afterwards, he

came round with his camera, and offered to take the group.

“Just as you are, ladies and gentlemen, for eighteen-pence—sixpence extra coloured.”

And he thrust a specimen of his performances under Madolin’s parasol.

She pushed it away without looking into the man’s face, and lowered the parasol so as to hide herself completely.

“What a bore these men are!” she said to the Colonel. “As if they could imagine that we cared for such rubbish. One would think they might learn to know the difference between ourselves and ordinary people.”

“But perhaps,” said the gallant Colonel, with a bow, “they cannot understand how the fortunate possessor of so many charms should object to see them reflected. Now, you know, just for the fun of the thing,

I should not in the least hesitate——”

“Oh! but I should, very much, very much indeed. Sitting for one’s portrait, even under the most favourable circumstances, is a thing that I detest. However, we need not trouble ourselves; he has found some people foolish enough to be taken in. Look—is it not perfectly ridiculous?”

For a party of trippers, evidently from London, loudly talking, loudly dressed people, were arranging themselves in a “group.” A buxom matron, resplendent in green silk and violet trimmings, in front, an engaged youth and maiden, over whom she was playing propriety, behind her, and an open-mouthed little boy, with an orange, in the background.

It was very amusing. They all stood with an air of such solemnity, the affianced pair evidently glad of an opportunity of appearing in public with their arms round

each other's waists. Even proud Madolin could not resist putting her parasol a little on one side, to watch the progress of affairs.

As she did so the photographer was in the act of counting. His eyes were fixed upon her, but his face moved never a muscle as he put the cap upon his lens, and hurried away with his picture, to develop it in a little shed which he had under one of the barges.

"I have seen some one very like that man before," said Aunt Griselda, "but I cannot recollect where. And so very impertinent. He was staring at us the whole of the time he was taking the picture. Madolin, my dear, I am quite sorry you brought us down here. I was never so annoyed in my life. I had no idea people could be so disagreeable. Here he comes again, and staring at us just as unpleasantly.

I am sure, if he thinks we wish to have our portraits taken, he is quite in the wrong. I should never think of such a thing."

"Of course not, auntie dear," said Madolin, very calmly, rising, and allowing Colonel Dewar to collect her books and work. "I think we will go now. The sun has become so very hot."

"Will you permit me?" said the Colonel, bending over her with an air of solicitude. "I am afraid the heat has been too much for you. May I offer you my arm?"

"Oh! thank you; it is nothing. You know I am not quite strong yet; but we are very near home."

And then a sudden thought seemed to strike her.

"No. I think I should like a drive. Take us to the nearest carriage, please."

"Madolin, dear," said Miss Griselda, "and with our own close at hand! I am sure Mac

would run up and order the man to bring it out directly. A hired carriage, you know, is not quite the thing."

"Never mind. I cannot wait for our own. There is one coming up now, Colonel Dewar, if you will beckon to the man."

In a minute or two they had got in, leaving Mac and Sir David on the beach, and the driver had orders to go towards the Downs.

"As quickly as you can," said Madolin, leaning back wearily. "I want all the air I can get."

For the cold, calm blue eyes which had looked upon her from behind that camera were those of Gideon Jetsam, and she remembered them only too well.

CHAPTER XII.

“**I** AM tired of Brighton. I do not wish to stay here any longer,” said Madolin Lauderdale, that evening, as she, Uncle Mac, Aunt Griselda, and the Colonel yawned through their game of whist. “I think I shall go home to-morrow.”

“My dear !” and Aunt Griselda let the cards fall upon the table, thereby startling Sir David, who looked feebly up from his cushions, and asked what was the matter.

“Only that Madolin says she means to go home to-morrow, my dear brother. Such a ridiculous thing! And she was

telling Colonel Dewar this morning how much she enjoyed the sea-breezes. She said they were making her quite young again."

"Not again," said the Colonel, bowing towards the fair object, not of his affections—for Miss Griselda fancied those were settling in her own direction—but of his fatherly admiration—"not again. Miss Lauderdale has never ceased to be young. I am sure she could not make such a mistake."

"Well, at any rate she said she was enjoying herself very much—did you not, Madolin?"

Enjoying "herself!" What a portion to enjoy! Especially under present circumstances. Madolin carelessly arranged her cards, then hid a yawn with them.

"The wind has changed. It is so insufferably hot now. I really cannot breathe

any longer in the place. And we have already been here nearly three weeks. I never promised to stay for an indefinite time."

"I expect those tiresome people on the beach have driven you away," said Aunt Griselda; "and of course when once you get a distaste for a place, you will never rest until you are away from it. If you remember, it was just the same at Heidelberg, though I must say I was really quite glad myself to get away from there, after that disgraceful affair about Nilken. But Brighton——"

"Oh! never mind, auntie, I don't wish to unsettle you in the least. Of course I should not have said that I intended to go, if it was to make any difference in your plans. Catton will take care of me on the journey, and I shall be quite content at the Chase by myself. You know I have given

over being dependent upon society now. I shall go by an early train, to avoid the heat."

"Well, I must say I never heard of such a thing," and Aunt Griselda took up her cards again, much relieved by Madolin's last speech. Of course Mac would go home with her—politeness would require that attention, and she herself would stay behind with Sir David. She must own she should like another week or two at Brighton, in the society of the charming old Colonel, who was rapidly learning to value sense and experience with white hairs, as much as he admired grace and beauty with the reverse.

"It was never like you, dear Madolin," she said, "to be changeable; but if you find that the heat is affecting you injuriously, I would not have you remain in the place another day. I know very well myself that

when the sea air ceases to be beneficial, it very soon becomes positively deleterious. But I do think that for myself and Sir David it will be better to remain a little longer—at any rate until we have given sufficient notice to the landlady. To sacrifice a whole week's rent, you know, my dear——”

“Oh! I don't wish you to do it,” said Madolin, quite coolly; “I would rather be alone. If I find that I need company after I have been at home a few days, I can send Bowles over for Hope Meredith. I suppose she has been at work long enough now to have got her heart into it, and so she can afford to give herself a little rest.”

“My dear, her heart was never in anything else but that sort of thing,” replied Aunt Griselda, who was glad of this opportunity of giving Uncle Mac a hint as to the inefficiency of any hopes which he might

have been entertaining in that direction. "I never saw a girl who was so completely taken up with one idea. She is certainly remarkably free from the usual little affectionate weaknesses of her sex. I am not quite sure that I approve of such strong-minded women myself. But of course they are exceedingly useful in their place."

"I beg your pardon, Captain Cayley," interrupted Madolin, "are you not revoking? You trumped hearts in the second trick, and now you are putting your knave upon my ten."

"Very likely,"—and Mac put his marker back three points. "I am afraid, Miss Griselda, you find me a very bad partner to-night; but I must say that Miss Lauderdale set me the example in the last hand. She trumped spades, and then took my king with the ace. Only no one noticed it, and so I said nothing."

"Thank you, very much,"—and Madolin hid another yawn. "I have no doubt you are quite correct. I am so tired that I do not know what I am doing."

"And so am I," said Miss Griselda. "My only wonder is, that we have kept up so long, after our ride in that jolting carriage; and, you know, Madolin, you would insist upon the man driving at such a rate. Really, if we had been thieves escaping from the police we could not have rattled on more furiously. I believe everyone was taking notice of us, thinking the horses had run away."

Madolin laid her cards down. Her face was very pale, her hands cold and stony. Her eyes looked, yet seemed to see nothing.

"I have completely lost the game. I forget what are trumps now. Suppose we give up. Besides, if I do go away to-mor-

row morning, I must begin my packing."

"And write to the housekeeper too, I suppose, to say you will be there? You know, everything is quite unprepared."

"Oh, I don't mind that. I believe I shall enjoy living pic-nic fashion for a few days, until the house is put into order. And besides, the park will be so pretty just now, that I can make it my drawing-room. Excuse me, then, I will go away. No, Auntie Grisel, you need not come with me; Catton will do all I want."

Auntie Grisel was quite agreeable, particularly as the Colonel was looking wistfully in the direction of the cribbage-board.

"And I daresay I shall leave some of my things behind, for you to bring when you return. You are a dear, good old auntie, and I am sure you will not mind the trouble."

"Not in the least," said Aunt Griselda,

briskly, packing up the cards and beginning to arrange the cribbage-board, at which she and the Colonel were soon engaged in a friendly game.

Perhaps Madolin's unexpected move would not be so very bad, after all.

"You will not desert us, I hope, Colonel Dewar, when my niece has gone away?"

"I should be exceedingly sorry, dear madam, to do anything of the sort. Indeed, I assure you, my little evenings here are amongst the most delightful——"

"Oh! thank you, thank you; you are too kind; but my poor dear brother does so enjoy your coming in. Though, you see, he takes very little part in the conversation,"—Sir David had been asleep all the time—"still, he is pleased when he finds that his old friends do not forget him. And though, of course, when Madolin is gone, we shall not be able to offer you any inducement——"

“My dear madam, the society of a sensible lady like yourself is always a sufficient attraction to your cozy drawing-room. At my time of life, a little conversation, seasoned with experience and knowledge of the world, is far more pleasant than youthful charms, which I have long ago left to my juniors in the race of life.”

After which elegant little speech the aged couple spent a delightful evening, whilst Sir David breathed heavily in his easy-chair, and Mac made notes in his pocket-book about that land business, and proud Miss Lauderdale was giving directions to Catton about her packing.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALL night long, while the waves broke with sullen murmur over the beach, and until the first faint streaks of dawn crept up from the east, Madolin paced her room alone.

It had come at last, the long-looked-for dread which had made her life for the last eight years a slow torture ; how slow, how merciless, with neither respite nor relief ! Between that parting at the door of the little church of St. Elma, her act of girlish daring and wilfulness accomplished, and this meeting, what wastes of suffering had been over-

past! And yet even they looked full of sunshine, safe, peaceful, compared with the blackness of darkness upon which she was entering now. And she must go through it alone; no human help or sympathy for her. The wall of separation which herself had built up shut her out from touch of friendly hand or look of pitying love.

There was only one glimmer of hope—Jetsam might not have recognised her. He would never think to meet her there. Besides, even if he did know her he could not serve his own purposes by forcing himself upon her. Had not her father said something about another indictment which could be brought against him if that first had failed? Would he then be bold enough to risk anything by making himself known? He might hate her as she hated him, and her secret was in his hands. He could leave her

in her splendid home, or he could bid her away with him—horrible thought!—to such a life as he chose to make for her elsewhere; but would he risk his liberty by doing that? He would scarcely choose to pay the penalty of imprisonment for the satisfaction of being able to torture and disgrace her. But she must be away from his abhorred neighbourhood. She could not bear to breathe the air which fed him too, to touch the ground which his feet trod. She must put miles and miles between herself and him; and then, if the worst that she could picture did come, death itself, brought by her own hand, should stand between them, and all would be over except the disgrace; but even that could not touch her then.

So she came home next morning with Catton, who was accustomed to her mistress's caprices. Besides, had not Miss Lau-

derdale flung into her lap the night before a lovely yachting costume of blue and white, almost as good as new, which would sell for a round two guineas at any second-hand shop?

"There, Catton, take it. I cannot bear the sight of the thing any longer. I shall never wear it again. It reminds me too much of the sea."

"Oh! ma'am, did ever anybody? But it was always like you, to be a good mistress. I could have wished, though, you hadn't took against such a pretty thing as this. You never had anything, ma'am, for morning wear, that you looked better in."

"Never mind, Catton. I don't care how well I look in a thing, if once I take a distaste to it. And the little hat that belongs to it."—Madolin flung that down too.—
"Take that away, and don't let me see it

again. It would look nice upon Tossie, if the girl ought to wear such things."

"Which she hadn't ought to, ma'am, and she the sort that she is. Not that I've anything to say against her, but she takes a deal of looking after, and I'm afraid she won't have improved herself with this three weeks' holiday at her mother's. You'll have her fetched back again, ma'am, I suppose, as soon as we get back, instead of her staying the month out."

"No, Catton, let her stay her time. She may as well enjoy herself whilst she can. I don't know that I care very much to have her about me any more. And my sea-side parasol, take that away too. Make what you can of it, only don't let me see it again."

"Dear me, ma'am, you *have* got tired out with Brighton. I never knew it take that effect upon you before. It's the change of

the wind, I suppose, and you not so strong as you used to be."

But Catton thought, as she gathered the things together, and carried them away, to be turned into money for her own purse, that very night, that it was a fine thing to have a mistress with such whims and caprices. One could put up with hasty journeys now and then, and nights of packing, when five-guinea yachting costumes were flung into one's lap as a set off, to say nothing of hats and parasols which were scarcely a touch the worse for wear. Catton wished the wind would change pretty often, if that was to be the way.

Tired of the sea, Miss Lauderdale said, when, after a week or two of complete retirement at the Chase, the country people found out, one by one, that she had returned, and came to call upon her, those delightful Regisons, who had heard from Miss Griselda,

being the first ; quite tired of the sea, it was so dull and monotonous, and the drive up and down that everlasting Parade moped her to death ; and then the air became so insufferably hot that she almost believed another day of it would have killed her. Oh ! Brighton was a weary place ! She did not think she should ever care to go there again.

“Exactly so,” said Mrs. Regison ; “and then if you try to get away from the Parade down to the beach, you are no better off, for the people bore you so with things to sell. Four and twenty of them came to us in one hour, when Gertrude and I were there last February ; and of course, in the summer season, when the London people begin to go, it must be a great deal worse. I think my dear Miss Griselda made a mistake when she suggested Brighton at this time of the year.”

Miss Lauderdale thought so too. Some quiet place would have been so much better. Indeed, Brighton could never be anything but tedious to people who did not care to be mixed up with fashionable life. And had Mrs. Regison enjoyed the country during this lovely summer weather? She had not felt the heat, probably, so much as her unfortunate friends at the sea-side.

“Oh, dear, no,” said Mrs. Regison, briskly. “The weather has been perfectly charming with us. And then, you know, Sir David was so extremely kind as to give us the privilege of coming into the park whenever we liked during your absence—so very good of him! I think dear Miss Griselda named it to him—just like her, was it not?—so thoughtful! I always say we never find anyone like Miss Griselda for thoughtfulness. And do tell Sir David, when you write, how frequently we have

availed ourselves of the privilege. I believe not a day has passed without our taking a walk in some part or other of the grounds. Such a pleasant change, you know, from our little house on the Matchborough road, which is really very flat and uninteresting."

Miss Lauderdale assented, with a stifled yawn. Yes, the Matchborough road certainly was very flat and uninteresting, and she was very glad that Aunt Griselda had thought of the park. They were quite welcome to make use of it whenever they liked, especially towards the larch plantation. She generally confined her own walks to the elm avenue and the little path near the stream.

"Oh, yes, I see you are not able to walk far yet. Such a pity, dear Miss Lauderdale, but you will soon get it up again; though really, so far, Brighton does not seem to have done you so much good as we could

have wished. You know only yesterday afternoon, after we had heard from Miss Griselda of your return, Gertrude and I were in the park, and caught sight of you in one of the side walks. Of course we retreated directly, not wishing to intrude, but we both of us said we should scarcely have known you again, you looked so very poorly."

Almost a smile flashed across Madolin's face. Perhaps, then, Jetsam had not recognised her, either. And Mrs. Regison continued—

"But then, you know, you will very likely feel the benefit of the change long afterwards. I did myself last year, after I had been in the neighbourhood for the moorland air. And I am really glad, my dear, that you are at home again, for I do think during Sir David's absence the park has not been kept so strictly private as he

would have wished. Of course, whilst the family were away, that little maid of yours, Tossie, might think it was quite proper for her to stroll about with her companions, but once or twice, especially lately, I have seen strangers prowling in the paths—one man taking photographic views only two or three days ago, I think, was it not, Gertrude, dear?"

"Yes, ma; you mean that man we both of us thought we had seen before. And I am sure, if it *was* the same man, Sir David would not have allowed him in the park on any account."

"Indeed!" and, with a chilly touch at her heart, Madolin smiled pleasantly on. How were all the people in the neighbourhood? And had Mrs. Regison seen the Milbanks lately?

But Mrs. Regison seemed determined to settle the identity of the suspicious stranger

before she went a step further. Even the Milbanks' health might stand over.

"Oh, yes, all right; but I had such a curious feeling when I saw that man. I felt so sure I had met him before somewhere, although the first day neither Gertrude nor I could remember where. However, only the very next day he was there again, skulking about the place with his photographic things, and it flashed upon me in a moment who he was; and what do you think I said to Gertrude?"

"Nay, indeed," said Madolin, toying carelessly with the little pencil which she had bitten through a few weeks before, on the occasion of Mrs. Regison's first visit.

"I told her I was quite sure it was Gustave Nilken; and, when I spoke, Gertrude saw the likeness, too. We were the more convinced because we have had several Australian papers lately, and one of them

mentioned his return. I think I told you some time ago it was talked about ; but it really seems to have come to pass now."

"Yes," added Gertrude, "and I am sure the fellow knew us—quite stared after us, as if he had seen us before, as indeed of course he had, many a time, for you know he was very attentive during the last day or two of his stay at the *Pension*. Just to think now that I have actually been handed into a carriage by him !"

"It was a wonder you recognised him," said Madolin, carelessly. And then in her agony, longing for some little proof that this man had not really followed her to the Chase, but might still be a stranger, she added, "I should have thought seven years of prison discipline would have rather altered him. Of course he cannot look like a gentleman now."

"Well, no, not exactly ; but still there is

quite enough of Nilken left for anyone to challenge him again, especially when your suspicions are once aroused. You know there was a peculiarly sharp look in his blue eyes, and he had a way of not looking you straight in the face, whilst yet he was taking notice of you all the time. And his moustache trimmed just in the same way. I suppose he has grown it again since they let him come home. Of course the dress was very different—a rusty black coat and check trousers, and an old Scotch bonnet—such a turn-out as one sees sometimes behind a quack doctor's stall in the market-place.”

Such a one, too, as Madolin had seen behind that camera on the Brighton beach. Yes, it was the same man, but she said nothing.

“Still you know,” Mrs. Regison continued, “for all that he was not a man to forget,

and I thought I ought to mention it to you at once, because he is the last person Sir David would allow upon the grounds if he knew. And who can tell what the fellow may be prowling about here for?"

Who indeed?

"I think we will not talk about him any more," said Madolin. "He is not a pleasant subject for discussion. I will tell the lodge-keeper to be very careful whom he admits."

"That is right. And I think that little maid had better have a hint given to her, too, because, if I was not mistaken, he was strolling about with her the first time we saw him—a most disreputable companion for her if it was really so! And now, dear Miss Lauderdale, you will drive over and see us soon, will you not? I am sure a little change will do you good. It is not wise of you to stay in the house so much by

yourself, especially when you are only just recovering from such a tedious illness. And we have seen so very little of you since we came into this neighbourhood. I was saying to Gertrude only the other day—”

But the entrance of Mrs. Milbank, who had heard of Miss Lauderdale's return, put a stop to any further remarks, and soon after the Regisons took their leave.

“How wonderfully old that poor girl is beginning to look,” said Gertrude to her mamma, as they crossed the terrace homewards. “No wonder we scarcely knew her again the other day. I don't fancy she would make very much of a sensation now, if she were to go back to the *Pension*.”

“Not much, I daresay. Indeed, one might take her for a woman of forty, and so exceedingly listless and uninterested. I think we will go down by the willow brook, my dear; it is the prettiest way through

the park; quite a contrast from what she was that morning at luncheon."

"Ah! but then Captain Cayley was there, and Miss Lauderdale is always so different in the company of gentlemen. I can't fancy why she has left Brighton though, if he is staying there with them, and come down to mope by herself here. I always believed Miss Griselda intended that to be a match."

"And perhaps Miss Lauderdale found it was not likely to be one, which made her come down here again. It looks very much as if she had come away in a pet."

"Very much indeed. But I saw from the first that nothing of that kind was likely to happen. If Captain Cayley takes a wife back with him at all, Hope Meredith will be the lady."

"Hope Meredith, my dear! Why, she is in a situation as nurse or something of that sort."

“Yes, but she has a way with her that goes a long way with men like him. You know he doesn’t care so much for grace and elegance, or anything of that sort. People are so different out there. I dare say a girl like Miss Meredith would do very well indeed for him.”

“Possibly. But if Miss Griselda had anything of that kind in her mind, it was very sensible of her to arrange matters as she did. It was just here by this willow stump that we met that man the other day. Miss Lauderdale may say what she likes, but nothing shall convince me he was not Gustave Nilken.”

CHAPTER XIV.

NOT until quite late in the afternoon was Madolin relieved from the necessity of talking about her visit, and explaining the reason of her sudden return, and listening to what everyone had to say about her appearance. After the Regisons came the Milbanks, and then Mr. and Mrs. Norbury, and then the two aristocratic old maiden ladies who had taken Miss Asgard's house at the Hollows. For the Nunthorpe people were very particular in matters of etiquette, and would not on any account, when they found she had returned, have omitted offering her their congratulations.

Besides, she must be so very lonely in that great house by herself; and one kind friend proposed to come and stay with her for a few days, and another would accompany her in a drive whenever she felt disposed to go out; and Mrs. Milbank would have taken her to Rossbury; and Mrs. Norbury, who was sure it must be a dreadfully unwholesome thing for her to stay there alone, asked if it would not be a relief to her to have little Percy down from the Rectory to amuse her in the morning.

“Just for a little company, you know. I always think a child is such delightful company, draws you out of yourself so completely. It is impossible to feel low when you have a dear little bright face like my Percy’s to look at. I am sure I should be delighted to spare him to you for an hour or two sometimes.”

But Madolin could not think of depriving

Mrs. Norbury of dear little Percy's company, even for so short a time as an hour or two; neither did she accept Mrs. Milbank's kind proposal about Rosbury, nor her daughter's offer to come for a few days to the Chase. All she wanted was to be quiet and look her life in the face. A pleasant prospect, truly.

And at last she was able to do it, able to drop the mask of courtesy and sit alone with her great wretchedness.

She leaned forward and buried her face in her hands; how different from the graceful, well-bred woman who, five minutes before, had entertained her guests with a pretty invalid air of languor and indifference, which became her so much better than even *hauteur* or playfulness. Miss Lauderdale in delicate health was charming, so all her friends said, with those great shadowy eyes, and that half-pensive smile, and voice which had lost its old ring of pride. But then, all

by herself in that great house, it was very sad. What could her friends be thinking of to let her do such a thing?

Merciful silence, which let her think and plan. It was no use attempting any longer to fly from her destiny. It had followed her. Jetsam had recognised her. And now he had come to seek her out. For what end?

Ay, for what end? Madolin asked herself, as she shivered there in the sweet July sunshine. There was no escape for her. He could bid her forth, he had the right, from her beautiful ancestral home, to follow his fortunes, the fortunes of a returned convict, whithersoever they might lead. Fair prospect indeed for the proud Miss Lauderdale. That portrait of her might be turned with its face to the wall by-and-by. The Lauderales would little care to be reminded, in years to come, that one of their line had

been the wife of a dishonest clerk, a thief, a forger. And even if she ended her misery with steel or poison, that would not end her disgrace. Jetsam would tell everything then, and her very memory would be a soiled, shameful remembrance.

There was but one way of safety for her ; to face him bravely, not wait for him to seek her out, but go and look for him, dare him to do his worst. Rather meet her humiliation than have it forced upon her. And he might be bribed to hold his peace. A man who loved gold well enough to risk so much for it once, would be willing to receive a price for silence now ; and so she might even yet keep her name and place in the world.

But how was she to bribe him, how find means ? Should she tell her father ; and having won his pity, ask money from him ? Nay, never. And now, old as he was, and

garrulous and feeble, such a secret would no longer be safe in his keeping. And she had nothing of her own. That fiery-hearted Spaniard had dowered her child with only beauty, pride, and passion. However, it must be done. She must sell her jewels, such as did not belong to the Lauderdale family-chest, make away with plate, take some of the accounts into her own hands, so that moneys would from time to time come into her care; and so at last she might be able to save as much as would set her free, for awhile at least, from the terrible dread which was eating out her life now.

After that day Miss Lauderdale shut herself up in the house no more. Fearing that some of her friends might send melancholy accounts of her to Brighton, she wrote to Aunt Griselda herself, saying that she was now quite comfortably settled, and that they need not distress themselves about return-

ing, so long as the place agreed with them. And then from morning to night she wandered about in the park, if by chance she might meet the stranger there, and so keep him from presenting himself at the house.

She had not to wait long. Sitting one morning on Hope's little heathery knoll at the top of the moorland slope, she saw a man skulking along towards one of the plantation paths; a small man with narrow, stooping shoulders and shuffling gait. Seven years of oakum-picking and stone breaking had not improved the outward appearance of the once courted and popular cavalier of the Heidelberg *Pension*. Madolin hurried down towards the other end of the path, so that she might meet him. There was neither fear, hate, scorn, nor loathing in her face as she calmly stepped out in front of him and brought him

to a halt. None of these things could avail her now, only perfect self-possession and restraint.

"I know you," she said, with a look in her eyes which kept him from overstepping the few paces she had left between them. "You are my husband; Gustave Nilken once, Gideon Jetsam now."

"But your husband still, madam," returned the man, with that cool effrontery which had served him so well in years of adventure past.

"My husband still. I know that. I saw you on the beach, at Brighton, two weeks ago."

"Yes, and did not give me the chance to see you again, or I would have made you look up something better for me than tramping about there, taking portraits at sixpence a head. This is a pretty place of yours, and it is a shame you should keep it

all to yourself, when anyone belonging to you stands in need of a lift. But I suppose nobody knows that we do belong to each other?"

"No," said Madolin, calmly. "I have always kept our secret. I should hope you have, too."

"Oh, yes. I didn't want to do you any more mischief; and besides, it couldn't have brought me any good then. Now, perhaps, Sir David might give me a lift, if he knew about it. I've walked all the way from Brighton here, with my camera and things, sometimes earning as much as paid for a night's lodging, and sometimes sleeping on the warm side of a straw-stack. You wouldn't like that for yourself, I dare say, nor take it either, if you had a chance of anything better."

"I would take whatever I deserved," said

proud Madolin. "There are harder things than sleeping under straw-stacks, and people may suffer them without deserving them."

"Yes; I know what you mean. That was a bad business at Heidelberg. If I could have kept dark a week or two longer, until we had got safely away somewhere. But, after all, it was not I who made the way so plain for both of us. I would have stayed there quietly enough, and never spoken a word to anyone, if you had let me alone."

Madolin's hands clutched each other tightly under her scarf. That was true enough. She had but herself to blame for the misery which had arisen out of her craving for power.

"I am not here to say anything about what is past. We were both of us very

foolish, and I, at any rate, have had a bitter price to pay. What is done cannot be undone."

Madolin said this very quietly. It would not do for her to express the scorn which was stirring in her heart, to reproach Jetsam with his deceit and falsehood. Bad as he was, she was in his power. He held her name, her position, in his hands. It was for him to hurl her down from her place in her father's home, or, lured by what she could offer him, leave her there in some sort of peace. Proud as she was, she must lick the dust at his feet, if she did not wish to be trampled beneath them.

"I will do what I can to help you, if you will go away and never come near me again. I will give you money, only you must promise to leave me here."

Jetsam put his hands into his pockets, whistled, looked up and down the grand

old avenues, then away to the red gables of the Chase.

Madolin read the meaning of the look. It meant that there was plenty of money somewhere, and, therefore, he should want well paying.

“No, I am not rich, and nothing here can do you any good. The place will not come to me. I assure you, Mr. Jetsam, I am little more than a poor woman.”

“But still you will pay me well for keeping our secret. I have kept it all the time.”

“Of course you have, or you could not demand anything from me for keeping it now,” said Madolin, flashing up a little, and then as quickly calming down into her old self-restraint; “but tell me what will content you.”

“Well, I should say a thousand pounds would start me off to America or New Zealand, and set me up in something respectable

there. A fellow with brains can generally get along if he keeps himself steady—and I have always done that. A thousand pounds, Madolin.”

Madolin shuddered as she heard her name pass his lips; but still she made no sign. Silence was her only safety.

“A thousand pounds, and paid down in a month. I’ll wait a month for it, if you can give me a little to be going on with. As I told you before, it’s been hard lines with me since I came home, and I don’t much relish sleeping in strawstacks when my wife is lodged in the best rooms of Nunthorpe Chase.”

“A thousand pounds!—I could not save it in years! You might as well ask me for the estate. It is impossible for me to give it to you. I will come here again to-morrow and give you all the money I have at present, and in a month I will bring you

what I can, but I can never gather up as much as that."

"What! and your father one of the greatest men about here, and you his only child? You must look about, though, and get it together somehow, or I shall not promise to keep quiet. I daresay Sir David would give it me thankfully enough, if I told him everything, and then asked him for it."

Madolin looked him steadily in the face.

"And then Sir David could prosecute you for forgery."

Jetsam shuffled about, put his hands in his pockets, and whistled again. He did not think Madolin knew quite so much.

"Ah, well," he said, after awhile, "eight years is a long time to go back for proofs; and perhaps, even if it all came out, transportation for me would not be so bad as exposure for you. You had better think

about that before you put on such grand airs. However, as I told you, I am willing to keep quiet if you do your part. If not, perhaps I may remind you that even if you get me transported again, I may come back at the end of the time and claim you for my own—my own Princess Madolin.”

Madolin clenched her hands until the nails pierced the soft white skin, but she stood there calm and still. Not yet, not ever, could she defy the man who had such terrible mastery over her life; but she would never cringe to him, come what might. She only said,

“I will come here to-morrow, and bring you what money I can. I shall then have had time to think how to raise more. I suppose you may go now.”

“Yes. I don’t know”—and Jetsam looked at her with a half touch of pity in

his face—"I don't know that I should ever have troubled you any more if I hadn't happened to meet you on the beach at Brighton, and you seemed to be having rather a better time of it than there was any need for; that fine old gentleman bowing and smiling over you as if he meant something particular, and the young one on the other side, for anything I knew, meaning it too. And you *are* mine, let me be what I am."

"Mr. Jetsam, stop," and Madolin drew herself up to her full height. "I have never been other than true to the miserable name you gave me. But I wear my own still, and no stain shall ever rest upon it. Your wife I will not call myself, but I am a lady, and I always will be that."

And her eyes flashed angrily down upon him; down, for Madolin was tall of stature,

like the rest of the Lauderdale women, and held herself most royally.

“You look very like what you used to be in the old times at Heidelberg; a little paler, and a little quieter, maybe, but with the same spirit yet. We did each other a bad turn then, Madolin. If you had not drawn me with your winning ways, I should have been safely away before those detectives got upon my track, and you might have been a wife for a better man.”

It was no time to spurn him then, to throw back upon him his guilt and deceit. To show even a pity, of which he might take advantage, would be fatal to her. To hold him firmly at arm's length, not to taunt him with the past, but simply to appeal to that part of him which gold of hers could buy, was her wisdom now.

“Never mind what might have been. We must bear our lives as we have made

them. To-morrow, here, at this time, I will bring you the money."

And Madolin turned quietly away from him.

CHAPTER XV.

IT had ended better than she had dared to expect. The horrible black cloud was put a little further away. If she could but by any means raise money enough to buy Jetsam off, all might yet be well. None need know the truth. She might live out her solitary time, then die and be buried as one of the grand old Lauderdale people, her own name on her coffin-lid, her own name graven on the stone above her, with neither spot nor smirch of blame.

Jetsam had shown no wish to claim her

for his own. That misery, at least, for which even death itself would have been a good exchange, was spared her. And, indeed, why should he want her, except for her gold? And if she could give him that without herself, why, so much the better for them both. As for his threat of telling her father, he was too wise to do that. Better for him to take his money and go quietly away out of the country, and let himself be forgotten.

But how to raise that money? She could not borrow from Aunt Griselda. The inquisitive old lady would never rest until she had found out why the money was needed; and upon the little obligation which the lending of it involved, she would draw for unlimited submission. There was the make of a tyrant in her, if only she had the opportunity of exercising her will, and Madolin could not bear to be tyrannised over. As

for Sir David, he would need the case explained to him in its very minutest particular, and then he would talk of it to everyone who came near him, and she would be an object of pity and commiseration to the world which did homage to her now. Hope Meredith she might have trusted. Hope could have helped her with counsel, if not with gold; but Hope was exiled, and a gulf, which no repentance could bridge, deepened between them now.

And Mac; true, steady, honest as the day, quiet of speech, but strong of heart, as she knew him to be, Mac would have done all she wanted, and asked no questions, and spoken no words about it. She need but have told him that she wanted the money, and he would have found means to procure it for her. But Mac she hated; hated him the more for that very goodness and simplicity which would not let him bow to her

sway. There was only one thought in her heart now towards Mac, to do him some bitter evil, for the slight he had passed upon her; to crush his hopes of happiness, as he had crushed her foolish vanity. That done—and she meant to do it in some way—he might go whither he would; but ask help from him—never!

But the money must be found, and the Lauderdale spirit would find it, and Madolin crushed the little flowers beneath her feet as she walked lightly, rapidly on towards the house. There was hope yet to release herself, and perhaps do her evil work for others too in the release.

And Catton, braiding my lady's hair that night, saw neither cramp of pain nor line of weariness in the white forehead. And Tossie, coming coquettishly in with a little curtsy to ask when she might take up her work again, found nothing but a pleasant

smile on my lady's face. And Colin, standing behind her chair during the long stately dinner, perceived never a touch of discontent in my lady's voice or manner. And most calmly she lay back on her couch—lay as she had slept, when, at ten o'clock, the housekeeper and all the rest of the servants came in for prayers, which, come shine or come shadow, must be read through every evening at Nunthorpe Chase.

Next day Madolin met Jetsam in that little woodland path, gave him what money she had been able to collect, and her promise to pay down into his hands that day month the thousand pounds which was to buy his silence and her peace.

Now it must be done. Madolin did not fear. She had immense will, immense resolution, immense firmness. She had the coolness, cunning, and intellect of the Spaniard, joined with the courage of the

English nature. Conscience lay still enough within her now—had so lain ever since Hope Meredith went away. No faintest fibre of pity would stir within her any more, for wrong she might work, or ruin she might win, for those whom once she loved. To preserve her own good name, to revenge her own wounded pride—this was all she cared for. Society should bow to Miss Lauderdale still, and she might hold her head loftily as ever, none knowing how narrowly it had escaped rolling in the dust.

Meanwhile matters were progressing very comfortably at Brighton. Madolin fancied she guessed why Aunt Griselda was in no hurry to come home. That good lady wrote in the best of possible spirits. Nothing, she said, could exceed Colonel Dewar's kindness to them. Scarcely an evening passed now without a visit from him, and he was so delightfully attentive to poor

dear Sir David—would sit out with him on the beach for hours together, and accompany them on their drive; and really quite seemed to consider himself one of the family.

Which was very pleasant, for, as Miss Griselda went on to say, Mac was scarcely any company at all. That Canadian business was occupying all his time. He said he wanted to get done with it, and be off home again; and, to tell the truth, she should not be at all sorry when he was gone. Some important payments which he had to make on behalf of the company who had sent him over, were due in the course of a few weeks, and then he expected to get away. Aunt Griselda hoped money matters were not making him uneasy; she hoped he would be able honourably to meet all proper demands; though why, if that was the case, he should look so dispirited

and out of sorts, was, she must say, a mystery.

But of course he would come down to the Chase for a few days before he went away. Indeed, if common courtesy did not bring him there to say good-bye to his friends, he would still be obliged to run over for a day on Sir David's business. For Madolin would be grieved to hear that her dear papa grew daily more feeble in mind, and was now almost incapable of attending to matters connected with the estate. They had persuaded him at last to engage a regular steward, and Mac's object in coming to the Chase was to look over the papers a little, and make a few payments, and put things in readiness for the new management. And then Aunt Griselda dived into domestic trifles, and ended with a second eulogium upon Colonel Dewar's kindness and consideration, for which they

could none of them be thankful enough.

Mac did come to the Chase. A very hasty visit, just to collect papers and accounts, and away. No need for courteous, winning ways with him now ; no need for the silver ornaments, and the crimson flowers, and the bright smiles, and the pretty airs of command. He did not seem to miss them either. Business, business, nothing but business during the one or two evenings which he spent in the library—accounts to look over, cheques to draw, columns of figures to add up, statements of expenses to make out.

Madolin, sitting in her father's great easy-chair, watched Mac writing out the cheques—fifty, a hundred, five hundred pounds, for different payments that had to be made. How valuable one of those little bits of paper would have been to her ! What a weight it would have lifted from her mind !

Idly she rose, and walking towards him, looked over his shoulder as he wrote. It was a cheque for one hundred pounds. Madolin thought how easily she could have altered the one into a seven, and slipped the paper away into her purse, and left who might to bear any little after-difficulty.

“But I suppose,” she said, “they are of no use until papa has signed them?”

“None at all,” said Mac, gathering the cheques into his pocket-book. And then opening a little inner drawer, he took out a roll of bank-notes, and counted them over.

“How much?” said Madolin.

“About two hundred and fifty pounds. I must tell Sir David—he ought not to keep so much money here. I suppose he had forgotten it.”

Madolin held out one of her jewelled hands.

“I think you might spare me a little of

it. It would go towards that set of emeralds which papa promised me ever so long ago. I wonder if he would give me it for my next birthday."

"You had better go to Brighton and ask him. If I could give it to you, I am sure you should be welcome to it. Or I should be very glad of as much myself just now."

And an anxious look came over Mac's honest face.

"Yes, I suppose people are never so rich that they would not like just a little more. Shall you be down again soon, Mac?"

"Yes, in about a week, to pay some more accounts, and arrange some of my own affairs."

"And then are you going away—quite away, I mean, back to Canada?"

"Yes—I have been knocking about here long enough. I wish to goodness I was

settled down again in my own bit of a hut, out west."

And Mac sighed. Madolin looked keenly at him from under the shadow of her fine black brows.

"Perhaps I shall come down to Brighton before you go."

"Very well. It would be a nice change for you. Can't you go back with me to-morrow morning?"

How calmly he talked. How little he seemed to care for her comings and goings. He ought to have flashed up into eager interest; he ought to have met her downward look, as she stood by him there, with one of surprised delight. Yet his hand never trembled as he turned over the little piles of money. Madolin bit her lip.

"No, I cannot come so soon as that."

"Why not? You came away in as great a hurry."

"Yes ; but then the heat was killing me. I could not have stayed another day in the place."

"Well, come when you like. It will be a pleasant change for Sir David and Miss Griselda. Do you ever see or hear anything of Hope Meredith now?"

"No," said Madolin stiffly. "I suppose she is quite happy and content. Miss Milbank saw her the other day, and said she looked the picture of happiness. So I suppose we need not trouble ourselves about her."

"Perhaps not, but I thought she was to come over here occasionally."

"So she might, if she chose. I told her we should always be very glad to see her. Is papa able to attend to business?"

"A little, but very little. I am in correspondence with a gentleman now, about coming as steward. Sir David has altered

very much during the last few weeks. I don't suppose he will be able to do much more than put his name to these cheques."

"Indeed! Suppose you were to lose one."

"I should look for it until I found it."

"And if you could not find it?"

"I should have to pay the money."

"And if you could not pay it?"

"Somebody else must pay it for me."

"And if somebody else would not pay it for you?"

"Dear me! What a catechism we are going through! Well, then, I suppose I must go to prison."

"How funny!" And a curious gleam shot through Madolin's black eyelashes. "I wish you would teach me something about business, Uncle Mac; you know I am as ignorant as a child, and if papa really is becoming incapable of attending to his

affairs, it would be so much better for me to learn; I could be a help to him then, you know."

"Yes, you ought to learn. I have no time now, but when I come again, we will go through some of the books, if you like; and I will explain things to you, and you will see how the money is spent."

"Thank you."

Mac packed up his papers, and next morning he was off again to Brighton.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DAY or two after that came a very polite, proper note from Aunt Griselda, announcing her engagement to Colonel Dewar, and promising shortly to enter into full particulars.

So that little drama had ended most successfully, though in entirely a different fashion from anything which might have been expected at its outset.

Madolin thought for a little while; felt just a sharp grip of envy, and then decided that she would be glad about it. Auntie Grisel would not always be trotting down to

the Chase now, for visits of an indefinite length; boring her to get up dinners, luncheons, or evening parties; or manœuvring for those dear Regisons to be invited, in order that they might talk over to their hearts' content "that disgraceful affair at Heidelberg." A clear course was beginning to open before her now. Aunt Grisel disposed of, Hope Meredith disposed of, Mac disposed of, Sir David sufficiently invalided to commit business matters to her care, life might become a tolerable thing again, though not what it might have been.

And Madolin began to pass restlessly up and down the room. Might have been, might have been.

If conscience never took hold of her now, remorse laid many a cold touch upon her soul in its hours of calm. Life, but no more living. A perilous safety, but no more the peace of well-doing and pure nobility. But

still—and Madolin went back to her first thought—with Sir David invalided, and the conduct of affairs left a little more to herself, she would at any rate be safe from discovery. She might gradually lay up, even before another month, sufficient to keep Jetsam at bay for a few weeks. The raising of the whole sum seemed impossible; but half she might manage, and she would give him her promise for the rest. And if he would not wait, if he insisted upon it all at once.—

Madolin set her teeth together. Even then it should be done. When had any of her father's people failed in anything which was set before them?

And through these eventful weeks Hope had been plodding through her new work, finding in it such rest and peace as those who go patiently on over the beaten track of duty seldom fail to win. Well for Hope

that fancy had not much time to weary over the past, or paint pleasant pictures for the future. Enough that she had done no wrong, that the wall of separation which had grown up so quickly and quietly between herself and Madolin Lauderdale had not been of her building. There can be no bitterness in the heart of an unselfish woman, who has found her work, and is content with it, looking neither before nor after. Hope had not now to learn for the first time that the great world had other things to do than watch over her special happiness in it, shape anything, bend anything to that. Long ago she had found out what keener, brighter intellects than hers often fail through a whole life-time to discover—that human souls are not made for themselves, but for others. And when a woman has come to that knowledge, the

pain and weariness of living may be said to have ceased for her.

Besides, Hope was doing work whose result could be seen and felt, and that, to a nature like hers, was in itself the medicine of discontent. Here, in these hospital wards, amongst sad-faced women, or maimed and helpless children, with the pitiful dumb questioning of pain in their eyes, there was enough to do, and little room for any thought, save how to do it best. And that was the sort of usefulness which Hope enjoyed. By the mere unconscious influence of her example she had done a great good to Madolin Lauderdale. She had let the light in upon a dark soul, and shown it the way to peace. But Hope never knew that; she had never given herself credit for it. She did know that she had nursed Miss Lauderdale through a dangerous fever, but she did not know that the higher work of nurs-

ing her through the fitful fever of discontent had also been laid in her hands ; that she had begun it bravely, and that only the patient's self-will had prevented the cure from being complete.

That was beyond Hope's ken. She could not believe in issues which she could not see. But to quiet the pain of a suffering child, to see the drawn little face gradually smoothing down into the unconscious peacefulness of slumber ; to dress some wound so quickly and skilfully that the patient should scarcely lose work or wages by his hurt ; to tend some ailing mother, and give her early back to the little ones who needed her so sorely at home—this was work which asked no faith. Doing this, Hope had her reward, and was at rest.

She had not been to the Chase again. Within a day or two of her settlement at the hospital had come the Brighton visit,

which Aunt Griselda had said was to be for an indefinite time. Then came tidings from the Milbanks of Sir David's failing health, which might prolong their stay for months. And whether they had come back, or whether the Chase was still shut up, she knew not; nor whether, through all these sunshiny summer days, Mac ever climbed the moorland hill, or sat by the willow brook and sent a thought to her. One thing she knew, that in work, only work, lay her peace. And one other thing, which scarcely, save in rare, quiet hours, would she own to herself, she knew,—that whatever brightness might come to her as the years went on, whatever sweetness, whatever success, the memory of his kindness, the touch of his hand, the tones of his voice, would be better and brighter and sweeter still.

The lady-superintendent was very proud

of her new pupil, if pupil indeed she could be called, who knew almost more than her mistress. And Dr. Clay, who hitherto had known Hope only as a sick-nurse, was not slow to find what a capital assistant she proved in the dressing-rooms. She was too good, he said, to stay long in a provincial town. She must go soon to London, and take the entire management of some institution there. It was a shame for her talents to be buried in a place like Matchborough. If only she did not knock herself up by working too hard. The girl went into it so with heart and soul, and brought so much intelligence and sympathy to her work.

“And means to stick to it too, my dear,” he said to his wife one evening, as in slippered ease he smoked his cigar in the garden. “And means to stick to it, too. Not like half the girls one sees taking up with that sort of thing, benevolent sentimentalists

with a touch of self-sacrifice which lasts for a year or two, and then engages itself to one of the medical students and goes in for fashionable life ; such nonsense ! Hope Meredith has eyes, ears, head, for nothing but what she is doing ; and when that is done she walks quietly away, without loitering about to know what you think of her. Fanny, I should like very much to bring her out here some afternoon, just to stay the night with us. I am afraid she is working a little bit too hard, and a breath of fresh air will do her good. Suppose you ask her over whilst this fine weather keeps up."

Fanny, who was a common-sense little woman, with a big loving heart, said "yes" directly. Although she had never seen Hope Meredith, except just that one morning when the Matchborough scheme had been talked over, still she had found out enough in that short time to know that the

girl was worth paying attention to, for her own sake, as well as for the sake of the work she did so well. And next time Dr. Clay went into town, he took with him a note from his wife, asking Hope to return with him to Nunthorpe for the night, and go back to her work in the morning.

Hope was very glad. It was her first holiday. For as Miss Lauderdale was away, and the Milbanks were in London, and there was no other house in Nunthorpe at which she was known, those occasional visits of which Aunt Griselda spoke so kindly, had never come to pass. She accepted the invitation more gladly too, because she could come to the doctor's house without awaking any old memories. She need not even call at the Chase, for it was shut up. A drive into the country, a sight of blossoming hedges and daisied fields, the fresh air blowing upon her, untouched by breath of wearied

patient, this was all she wanted ; and perhaps to bring back a nosegay or two for the poor people, who had not looked upon flowers for many and many a day.

CHAPTER XVII.

BUT Hope would have kept a safe enough distance between herself and Nunthorpe, had she known that next morning, as she and Mrs. Clay were strolling down by the brook side at the bottom of the doctor's garden, the little brook on whose mossy banks, a quarter of a mile higher up, she had once had such a pleasant afternoon's fishing, they should have met Captain Cayley, with half-a-dozen of the Chase dogs at his heels.

Tyke was one of them, and with a loud bark of delight he sprang upon Hope,

almost knocking her into the water as she stooped to reach some of the flag-flowers and forget-me-nots which grew so thickly there.

“Why, Miss Meredith!” *Hope* was upon Mac’s lips, but the sight of bonny little Mrs. Clay, almost buried in a clump of tall flag-leaves, sent it back just in time. “Miss Meredith, what in the world brought you here?”

“Dr. Clay’s pony-carriage,” said Hope, very quietly, but with a great throb at her heart. “He told me I wanted a holiday, and Mrs. Clay asked me to come. I am gathering these flowers to take back to the patients. And that reminds me I have never had an opportunity of thanking Stokes for that lovely nosegay he brought up the morning I went away. If you see him, will you tell him?”

“No; I won’t do anything of the sort,

for I brought you the flowers myself. I told Miss Lauderdale to tell you."

"Then perhaps she misunderstood. She said the gardener had brought them for me to take to the patients, and I believe, whilst they lasted, they were as good as all Dr. Clay's medicines."

"Very likely; but they were not brought for the patients at all, they were brought for you, and I only said, if you did not care for them, you could give them to the people."

"Then I did not have the right message. It was Miss Lauderdale's mistake."

"Confound Miss Lauderdale, and her mistake," said Mac, under his breath, stooping down to do something to one of the dogs' collars. "Off, Tyke, off, you are covering Miss Meredith's dress with the marks of your paws."

"Oh! never mind; it is not a bit of

consequence," said Hope, glad enough to have anything to talk about just then. "Is he not a handsome fellow, Mrs. Clay? He used to be so fond of me when I was staying at the Chase. I could always make him come away from Captain Cayley to me."

"Could you, indeed? And Captain Cayley so fond of dogs, too! You must have had very great powers of attraction."

But as Mrs. Clay said that, she began to suspect that Hope's powers extended a little beyond Tyke. And she began to have a little light, too, upon Miss Griselda's great eagerness to have that hospital appointment settled. Dr. Clay told her the old lady had jumped upon it like a cat upon a mouse. But Fanny was not a woman who made other people uncomfortable by her suspicions.

"Pray may we ask what brought *you*

here, Captain Cayley?" she said; "as we have accounted for ourselves. I thought you were down at Brighton, and the Chase shut up."

"Not quite. Miss Lauderdale has been there for a fortnight."

"Nay, never; and no one knowing anything about it, or calling upon her. But how could we tell? The place looks shut up enough, and she has not been seen at church."

"I daresay not. She got tired of the sea-side, and would come home by herself, at a day's notice. She seems to want to be quiet."

"Yes; but still one must do what is polite. And how is Sir David?"

"Very shaky, very shaky indeed. I was obliged to come over to see after some business for him. He has broken up very much since they went to Brighton. He was only

saying the other day he wished he had Miss Meredith to nurse him ; and I wish he had, too. I'm sure, if anyone could bring him round again, she could."

"Poor Sir David !" said Mrs. Clay. "I'm afraid Miss Griselda worries him ; and when he comes back he will not be much better off, for Miss Lauderdale is too fond of her own way to be a good nurse. I do think, Miss Meredith, you ought to take pity on him."

But Hope only shook her head. No more Nunthorpe Chase for her now, nor pleasant walks by the willow brook, nor half-hours of etching in the bay-window, with Mac to mix the colours for her, and guide her hand. Nay, had such things ever been at all for her, or had she only dreamed them ? For it seemed years and years ago since she had looked into Mac's face. And Miss Lauderdale was down at the Chase

now, and he was there for a day or two on business. Should she spoil it all?"

Perhaps Mac noticed that quiet shake of the head, and thought he might have something to do with it, for he went on fumbling about with his dogs all the time, and talking in a business-like, matter-of-fact way, as if it was not of the least consequence what any one thought about it.

"I promised I would attend to things and keep them straight as long as I could, but I'm looking about for a steward now, for I'm off to Canada next month. This land concern is about finished now, and I begin to feel as if I should like to be in harness again."

"I don't think you have ever been out of it," said Mrs. Clay—"you always seem to have been doing something or other on the estate—drawing plans for cottages, or looking after workpeople, or something. Dr.

Clay says you are agent and steward, and architect and surveyor, rolled into one."

"I don't know for that," and Mac gave a little sigh. Was it for himself, or was it because Hope would go on gathering those flag-flowers and forget-me-nots, with never one single look of regret for his going away? "It's been a shiftless sort of life, not much good to myself or anyone else, that I can tell. Anyhow, I shall be glad to be off again. When do you go back to Matchborough, Miss Meredith?"

"This morning. Dr. Clay will drive me as far as the Exton toll-bar, on his way to Rossbury; and then I shall walk the rest. It's only about two miles, and such a splendid morning, too!"

"Yes; but ought you not to go and see Miss Lauderdale? I should think she will be rather offended if she finds you have been so near without calling upon her."

"But you need not tell her. And I thought the Chase was shut up."

"But you know now that the Chase is not shut up, and I *shall* tell her, just on purpose. What do you think, Mrs. Clay?"

"I think there is no question about it, now that you have seen Captain Cayley. If you could wait until after luncheon, I would go with you myself, but it would not do for me to call before."

"And I cannot wait until afternoon," said Hope, hurriedly. Poor girl! she felt that it was time now for her to be back in harness, too. "Miss Archer is depending upon me to be in the dressing-rooms this afternoon. I must be there."

"And you shall be there. Mrs. Clay, you must not tempt people away from their duties; but, Miss Meredith, you shall go to the Chase still. I will walk with you there myself, and after you have seen Madolin, I

can drive you to Matchborough. You will be there then, quite as soon as if you had set off at once and walked from Exton ; besides not being so tired. Now, Mrs. Clay, is that not just what she ought to do ?”

Of course Mrs. Clay, being a wise little woman, and possessing a fair share of feminine penetration, thought it was just what Hope ought to do. Else why should Captain Cayley so suddenly change his mind, and be ready to walk his half-dozen dogs back again, after scarcely so much as a sniff of the fresh air, or a tumble in the shining brook ? So they went, and she stayed behind amongst the forget-me-nots.

Ah ! Dr. Clay might say what he liked ; men always thought they knew all about everything ; but if she had been asked to give her own private opinion about it, she should have said it was not very likely that

Miss Meredith would ever take such a position in any London institution as had been singled out for her; or indeed that she would stay long in any institution at all, if Captain Cayley could have his own way. And as for Miss Meredith; well, her heart was in her work now, but that was no reason why it should always be there. She was one of those honest, conscientious girls who would look a thing round on all sides, and if it was the right thing, do it, without any fuss or nonsense. Just the sort of wife for a Canadian settler; and what a boon for the people out there, who had to send fifty miles sometimes for a doctor. Why, John himself, if he had any sense at all, would allow that the most skilful nurse he had ever seen would be more in her place there, if that was the only way of looking at it. And so practical, too, and with such clear-sighted common sense. If only

Captain Cayley could make her see it.

So reasoned Mrs. Clay with herself, amongst the flag-leaves and forget-me-nots, as she watched Hope Meredith and Mac slowly tracking their way through the long grass to the Chase, his face towards her, hers away from him towards Tyke, who kept bounding at her side.

“It all has to be done yet, I fancy,” thought good Mrs. Clay, “so far as she is concerned. And yet he said only a month.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOPE tried hard to keep the conversation to outside matters during that fifteen minutes' walk across the Chase, and succeeded very well indeed. For there was all the Brighton visit to be talked about, and then her own new life, and how she meant to work very hard and learn all she could, so that she might become the superintendent of a first-rate hospital, and be able to train others. And she talked to Mac very eagerly, and tried very hard to make him understand that this really was the work of her

life ; that she had been thinking of it, longing for it, always ; that it was not a new thing taken up just now, because she did not happen to have anything else to do, or because nothing else fell in her way.

If he thought she had been building castles in the air about him, he should not think so any longer. Or, if he thought she had been angling for favour of his during those few weeks at Nunthorpe, he should find out he was mistaken there too. And that gave Hope's manner a little touch of petulance and defiance, which, though she did not at all intend it to have that effect, was rather fascinating than otherwise.

However, Mac let her talk herself out—for was there not the long seven miles' ride to come, when he meant to have things a little more his own way ? Hope should not talk quite so eloquently about her plans then, but be compelled to attend to him

whilst he laid before her what was in his mind as regarded the future. And if the carrying out of his plans obliged the little lady to alter a few of hers, why, so much the better.

And Mac smiled a pleasant smile, which Hope could not understand. Ah! he was like all the rest of the men : he thought he had only to ask and have, where a woman's love was the treasure to win.

They had come to the end of the elm avenue, leading out into one of the woodland paths, when they saw someone dodging behind the trees. A small, rather shabby-looking man, with short light hair and narrow shoulders.

"I saw that fellow here last night," said Mac, "as I was coming across from Nunthorpe station. I must tell the lodge-keeper not to let people through so easily."

"Holloa there!"—and he shouted to the

man—"do you know that these are private grounds? No right of road here."

"And trespassers will be prosecuted," added Hope, mischievously. "You ought to remember that."

"And so I do," said Mac, facing round upon her with a look which made Hope wish she had been quiet. "You didn't warn me away then, though; you showed me the path, right on where I wanted to go, and you have no business to block it up again. Now, then, sir, have you any business here? Wait a bit, Hope. I'll go after him."

And Mac dashed into the brushwood, coming back very soon.

"He's some loose-handed fellow with nothing to do." It seems to me I've seen him before, though I can't tell where. I told him he must not show himself on these grounds again, and he looked impudently at me, as much as to say that that was more

his affair than mine. Not a poaching-looking fellow, though—not rough enough for that; nor the kind of man one usually finds trespassing. But yonder is Miss Lauderdale, coming up the path; perhaps we had better not say anything to her about him—it might make her afraid to come out alone.”

“Oh, no,” said Hope, “Miss Lauderdale is as brave as a lion. Nothing would ever make her afraid. She does look a little bit surprised now, though.”

For Madolin, coming suddenly out upon them from one of the side paths, started violently, and all the colour left her face for a moment. Then she was herself again, calm, stately, self-possessed, as was meet in giving greeting to the two people whom of all others in the world she hated.

“You surprised me very much,” she said, holding out her hand to Hope, as though they were meeting after a short night’s rest

—as though strife, and fear, and misery enough for a lifetime had not been pressed into the weeks since last they clasped hands. “I was not expecting to see you—indeed, I thought most likely you did not know I was at home.”

“And I didn’t until this morning, when Captain Cayley told us. Dr. Clay brought me over from Matchborough yesterday to stay for a night, and I was going back with him this morning as far as Exton toll-bar, to walk the rest of the way; only when we knew you were at home, Mrs. Clay said she thought I ought to call.”

“And I promised Miss Meredith,” added Mac, “that I would drive her into Matchborough myself after she had seen you. You know one can always find plenty to do there.”

“Oh, yes,” and there was a world of bitterness, which only bitter people could

have appraised, in Madolin's voice. "I know you are always glad of an excuse for going into Matchborough. And how are you getting on at the hospital, Hope? Do they behave tolerably well to you? They have not quite worked you to death, at any rate, for you look better than when you first went; but then, of course, it was very moping for you out here. I think I was very selfish to have kept you so long. Is this your first holiday?"

"Madolin,"—and Mac struck down a whole branch of wild roses with his dog-whip,—“don't talk in that way. One might think Miss Meredith was a servant out for the afternoon.”

“Never mind,” said Hope; “I don't care a bit, and I am sure Miss Lauderdale does not mean it. Yes, this is my first day out. I really did not feel as if I wanted a holiday now, only Dr. Clay offered to bring

me, and I thought it would be a nice opportunity of taking some flowers back to the patients."

"Yes," said Mac, who was apparently determined to make himself the reverse of agreeable to Miss Lauderdale, "and that reminds me, Madolin, there was some mistake about those flowers which I brought in to you the morning Miss Meredith went away. You never told her they were from me. She thought the gardener brought them for her to take to the patients. You must have given her my message wrongly."

Hope blushed scarlet, and Madolin bit her lips.

"I cannot charge my memory with it," she said, very proudly. "I have had other things to think about than flowers since then. Miss Meredith, I apologise."

"Captain Cayley, it is too bad of you. Why did you say anything about the

flowers? Please don't take any notice of him, Miss Lauderdale. I only just happened to mention it a while ago, and say I was much obliged to the gardener for them. Tell me about Sir David—is he pretty well?"

"Please don't take any notice of him." What a degree of familiarity it implied! And so it had come to this, had it, that Hope was to tell her not to be offended at anything Mac might say? And even now, his eyes, beaming with honest if unspoken love, were resting on the simple girl. No wonder *she* had failed to bring him to her feet—failed to win his rough true heart, and then fling it from her, saying it was not her will to marry. And they thought they were going to be very happy together, did they? Ah well! poor things, let them think it as long as they could. With exceeding coldness, Madolin replied—

“Thank you, I believe papa is not very strong just now. I was telling Captain Cayley the other night that I must begin to learn business, so as to be able to help him a little.”

“And Miss Griselda?”

“Aunt Griselda is well, thank you. Indeed, I believe she is quite renewing her youth at Brighton—finds the sea air so refreshing, you know, and all that sort of thing. Shall you stay for luncheon, Miss Meredith?”

“Miss Meredith!” How cold it all sounded—cold, and proud, and hollow. Was this indeed the Madolin Lauderdale who had once been so kind to her, who had once leaned upon her for help and guidance, and talked of their love as a thing that could not die? What had she done then that all should be so changed? Hope turned to Uncle Mac.

"Must I stay? I have to be at the hospital soon after three."

Mac consulted his watch.

"That only gives you half an hour before we start. No, Madolin, no luncheon to-day. But we must go on to the house at once, for me to give orders about the ponies."

"Excuse me, then, one moment. I will join you directly. I thought I saw a man there with photographs. I told him if he came again I would buy one."

Madolin slipped away, met Jetsam in one of the little side-paths—he had been waiting for her there for the last ten minutes—stayed long enough with him to make an appointment for an hour later, and rejoined her companions, with scarcely a trace of hurry or discomposure about her.

"It was a man who has been taking some photographs of the Chase. I believe he is

not very well off, so I promised to have a few."

"Oh! then that accounts for it," said Mac. "I was almost sure I had seen him before. He is that poor fellow who wanted to take our pictures on the beach at Brighton. I thought at first he was prowling about after the game, and I was going to tell the lodgekeeper not to let people of that sort in."

"You need not do that, then. He is quite harmless. I have allowed him to show me his things once or twice, and I have told him just now that he may come again. You know papa is not so very particular about the place being kept private."

"All right. I thought it was you who did not like having strangers about. And now I will go on to give directions about the ponies. I shall meet you somewhere on the terrace."

For awhile Hope and Madolin walked on in perfect silence. Hope racked her brains, but could not think of anything to say. She wished she had not come to the Chase at all—there was something so cold and distant and *distracte* about Miss Lauderdale's manner. And she seemed now to be following Miss Griselda's lead about Captain Cayley; only doing it with a bitterness which was far worse than the petty little mosquito bites of the elder lady.

That avenue up which they had so often walked heart to heart in perfect trust and confidence, seemed miles long this morning to poor Hope, but at last the house was reached. With the lofty air of one who confers an infinite obligation in acknowledging a fault, Madolin said, as she preceded her guest into the dining-room,

“I am really excessively sorry I did not give Captain Cayley's message correctly.

Poor fellow, he seems to be vexing his righteous soul about it. I suppose I must have been talking to Aunt Griselda at the time, and so did not pay much attention. However, it is not of so much consequence, as you have cleared matters now."

"None at all; and even if we had not, there would have been no need for you to trouble yourself. How is Miss Griselda?"

"You asked me that before; but I suppose your memory plays you false sometimes, like mine. Thank you; Aunt Griselda is very well, and, as I told you, quite blooming—as much so at least as she can be with an invalid like papa to take care of."

"And is it not very lonely for you here, quite by yourself?"

"Oh! that is of no consequence. I am not at all dependent upon society. If I wished it, plenty of people would be glad

enough to come ; but I prefer being left to myself. You know I do not care for chattering and talking."

Madolin, leaning against one of the stone mullions of the window, toyed with the ribbons of her straw hat. How proud she looked, her head a little raised, her eyelids half dropped ; and yet now that her face was quiet, there were lines of great pain upon it, and a restless, flickering look in what could be seen of the dark eyes. Hope could not bear this distance and estrangement. Coming a little closer to Madolin, she put both her hands on hers. Miss Lauderdale did not return the caress, but neither did she draw her hands away.

"Miss Lauderdale, how different everything is now ! Have I vexed you ? What is it that makes you not care for me any more as you used to do ?"

It pleased Madolin to be deferred to, to

have forgiveness asked of her, as of an injured person—to feel herself in the position of a queen stretching out the sceptre of mercy to one who desired to be at peace with her.

“My dear Hope, it is really nothing. I have many things to think about now, and I suppose I have not been just the same since my illness. You know anything like that often makes a change in people. But, if ever you like to come over for a day or two, your little room is always ready for you.”

“Yes, but it is not the little room I want—it is what I used to have of your kindness. Why has that gone away from me?”

“Oh! well, I can’t tell exactly, but you really have not vexed me at all. I think now I was rather foolish in telling you so much of my heart when first you came; but I happened to be in a stupid mood just then, and felt as if I must have some one to talk

to, and now I am more myself again, and don't feel the need of it so much. I suppose that must be it. But there is Captain Cayley on the terrace—he has come for you.”

Hope took her hands away, but not before Madolin had felt the slight tremor which passed through them, as she turned and saw Mac upon the terrace.

“He looks wonderfully beaming,” she said, with a sort of sneer—“quite radiant, one might say, with satisfaction. I suppose I shall soon be called upon to offer my congratulations to the happy pair. Of course you will tell me when anything is really decided. I quite understand now why Captain Cayley had such pressing business at the Chase—it was most fortunate for you both.”

Hope turned away with a little flash of pride. From anyone else the words would

have been insolent, but the concentrated bitterness in them now called for pity more than anger. And yet had she nothing to be pitied for? Had she suffered nothing? Had she nothing to crush and hide away in her own heart that she must stand there patiently to be thrust at by another, and that other the one who had not long ago shown kindness to her? Why had she come away from her work at all, which, if it brought her nothing else, brought her at least freedom from insult? Instead of going back strengthened and refreshed, she must go back now wounded and desolate and sad.

“Good-bye, then, Miss Lauderdale. I must not keep Captain Cayley waiting.”

“Oh! no, indeed you must not—he could not bear that at all. And you look as if you were rather offended with me—well, I suppose happy people can afford to look

like that, so good-bye. Don't work too hard, though I must say it agrees with you wonderfully well. I think I will not go down to the gate with you, as I have been out so much already to-day. Good-bye again. Aunt Griselda asked me if I had heard anything of you, and I said no ; but I can answer differently now."

And so they parted.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOPE almost flew across the terrace, like a bird let loose from its cage, or a captive from his cell. Madolin, standing there at the window, watched her. How eager she was then to be with her brave lover again! And how carefully he placed her in the little carriage, and folded the rug round her feet; and how proudly took his place beside her, and careered away towards the lodge gates! One could always tell when Mac was happy, by the way he carried himself. He had not held his head so erect, and so straightened out his broad chest, when they were driving up and down that

Brighton parade, or strolling on the crowded beach. No, all the spirit had seemed crushed out of him then—neither smile nor tone nor look of hers could rouse him into animation. But now—see the difference now!

Madolin's face gathered blackness. She clasped her hands tightly together—the hands upon which Hope's had rested with a mute caress. And Hope loved Mac, and Mac loved Hope, and that was why she had failed to bring him to her feet. And all was so black and dark, and she must stand for ever out in the shadow, whilst those she hated went forth into the sunshine. And yet there was light enough left in her soul to show her how mean and miserable she was for hating them; and she hated them the more for that the hate of them had made her obliged to hate herself.

She looked at her watch. The hour had

nearly past. She must go and meet Jetsam. He was waiting for her behind a clump of trees in the plantation.

“One had need be a patient man to bear this sort of thing,” he said, skulking out from his hiding-place as she came in sight; “and that young fellow setting his dogs at me for a poacher. I’ve seen him before, too. He was sitting with you on the beach at Brighton, and I want to know what brings him here. I have a right, Madolin, to know that, for all I’m willing to keep dark in other ways.”

“You may know whatever you like,” said Madolin, proudly, yet patiently. The most galling link of her chain was this, that, whilst she scorned the man who had fastened it upon her, she was yet forced to submit to his yoke, through fear of the heavier disgrace which he could inflict upon her if she chafed and rebelled.

“You have a right to ask, and I can answer you truthfully. I remain here the maiden daughter of my father, and here I shall remain until I die. It is impossible a Lauderdale can dishonour the name she bears. Have no fear of me.”

“Well, and now that money.”

“I do not think I can raise the whole sum for you. I will give you all I can, and the rest as soon as I can. Here, take my watch, and these jewels—they are worth a great deal.”

“A great deal to you, but not so much to me. The detectives have not been upon my track three years without getting me pretty well known in most places where things like these could be turned into money. And as for waiting, I will not wait. Give me my price, and I will go quietly away to America, and trouble you no more. You could get it if you tried, and you must, or I

will have it out of Sir David. Meet me here with it to-morrow."

Madolin's hands dropped helplessly.

"I cannot do it."

Jetsam looked at her. It was his turn now. He was fond of power too. How she had lorded it over him during those two or three brilliant weeks at the *Pension*; but she was in his hands now, to do with as he would. True, her father had a little hold upon him—but what a far more terrible hold he had upon her! She stood there before him, white, stony misery upon her face; but she would not own her misery—she would not ask his pity. Oh, these proud Lauderdales!

"Well, what else, then?"

Madolin shivered, drew herself up, and faced him calmly again.

"If it must be done, I will find means to do it."

“Very well. To-morrow. Here at noon.”

“Yes. I will be here.”

And Jetsam went away.

“Oh! that I might die!” said Madolin, as she flung back her veil and breathed in the soft, warm July air. “Oh! that I might die! But——”

And then she thought of Hope Meredith and Mac, riding along together in the summer sunshine—so happy, so content. Truly their joy was well-nigh the blackest cloud in her misery. Deepest hate of all, hate of the innocent, had its fangs in her soul, and stayed even her longing for death.

She went slowly back to the house. There was a letter from Aunt Griselda, containing a further explanation of that excellent person's prospective happiness. But first she went into a few particulars about her poor dear brother's health. Madolin would be very

sorry to hear how rapidly it was failing. The doctors said it was the beginning of a gradual breaking-up. He must not hope for permanent recovery, though, of course, with care and attention, life might be preserved for years. Mac was very kind, transacted all needful business for him, was bringing the books into a satisfactory state, ready for the new steward, whenever a suitable person could be found to fill the office ; but as he had run down to the Chase himself for a night or two, he would tell her all the news of general interest, and also explain more minutely the state of her papa's health.

And now she might enter into a few details relative to her own prospects. No doubt dear Madolin would be surprised to hear of the proposed change in her domestic arrangements—a change which she had not determined upon without much thought and consideration. To tell the truth, Colonel

Dewar's deportment from the first had left little doubt upon her mind with respect to his ultimate intentions; but still a proposal of that kind always did take one by surprise, when actually made; and she must say she had sustained quite a shock when, in the course of a quiet game at cribbage, the dear old gentleman placed his heart and fortunes at her disposal. However, to be forewarned was to be forearmed; and having previously considered the probability of such an offer, she was able to receive it with becoming self-possession, and return an answer which was satisfactory to both parties.

Then Aunt Griselda became playful, rallied Madolin upon her lengthened spinsterhood, reminded her that she was but a stone's-throw from the *pons asinorum* of thirty, and urged the following of her own bright example, whilst yet a moderate measure of youth and health remained. She

wound up by a statement of the worthy Colonel's position and resources, and said that when they left Brighton he intended to accompany them to the Chase, for the purpose of being formally introduced to his future niece.

Madolin twisted the letter up, and gashed and pinched it with her fine, sharp, almond nails.

Aunt Griselda's engagement was good, so far as it relieved her from continual visits, and cannonades of wearisome advice. Otherwise it was a mere accident, which could not touch her closely. One thing was well. A week was to elapse before their return home. Jetsam would be disposed of then, and all would be safe. She could breathe freely. Aunt Griselda was so terribly inquisitive; she would insist on finding out about everything. And if even her new happiness engrossed her a little, still

that would be almost as inconvenient, for she would continually be taking walks with the dear old Colonel; and who could tell but that they might chance upon a fair-haired stranger, crouching about amongst the laurel-bushes, and perhaps hail him as a trespasser, and then find out about him what would sadly spoil the fair aspect of things at Nunthorpe Chase?

But in a week all that would be past. *How* past, Madolin could not quite tell. She must take counsel with herself—think, plan, contrive, act. She might go over to Brighton, get a cheque from her father for household expenses, cash it, and then profess to have lost the money. Or there was that roll of notes in the little inner drawer.

And a strange look came over Madolin Lauderdale's face; strange as if across some pleasant English lawn a spotted leopard

should suddenly spring, bright in its tropic savageness and cruelty.

That little roll of notes which Mac had counted over the night before ! If—if—— Ah, well, perhaps he might yet have to pay for the slight he had passed upon her. Need of hers might work ruin of his. Let him make love to Hope Meredith whilst he could, but let him know that crushed pride, with the life lingering in it yet, could give a terrible sting before it died.

CHAPTER XX.

HOPE MEREDITH and her companion were proceeding at no very hurried pace along the glades of Nunthorpe Chase.

Mac had purposely given himself a needlessly long time for the drive, because he knew that was the only chance of getting Hope all to himself. He was determined that this ride should either end or mend matters between him and the brave, hard-working, true-hearted little girl whom he would fain carry home, his bride, to that farm-steading across the Atlantic. What Hope thought about it he could not tell.

She bewildered him, even while something far down in her honest brown eyes, so seldom lifted to his now with the old look of perfect trust, drew him on to love her more and more. Why did she hold herself apart from him now? Why did she sit so very upright, apparently absorbed in the beauties of the landscape? One might think she had never seen those sweeps of purple moorland before, and would never see them again. Was she coquetting with him? No. There was not a bit of that sort of thing in the little girl's nature. He almost wished there was, sometimes, for then he should have had an excuse for thinking that he was of some importance to her. Now, she did not give him a chance of thinking anything of the sort. Indeed, it rather seemed to go the other way; else why had she been in such a wonderful hurry about that hospital appointment, and why had she so quietly met

and knocked over all his arguments against it? She must have seen that he wanted her to stay; and yet, as coolly as possible, she made all her arrangements, and went off to her work; and he might never have seen her again if it had not been for that chance meeting at the bottom of the doctor's garden.

And yet, and yet; there was just enough consciousness in her manner now to give him hope. Her cheerful independence seemed to be breaking up a little. She was ruffled, ill at ease. She had lost the pretty, quaint, demure ways which used to be so charming, and there was a sort of constraint about her now, not half so delightful, but yet giving him a sense of power over her which, after all, was very pleasant, if only he could find out what it was that he had power over, and how much power she was willing to let him have. And did she know, he wondered,

how much power she had over him? Did she know how she had nestled down into his thoughts; how she had become to him home, and rest, and peace, and everything? Mac must find that out, now or never.

"I think I told you that I was going away," he said, trying to look very indifferent about it.

"Yes; you said so to Mrs. Clay."

"No, I didn't, I said so to *you*. At least, I might say it to Mrs. Clay, but it was you I wanted to know. Are you glad, or are you sorry?"

"I am not quite sure. I thought you had come to England for a long time."

"So I had; a year, at any rate. But I don't see why I shouldn't go and settle down to work like other people."

Mac put a great emphasis on that "other

people," and Hope just gave herself a little twitch.

"If you mean me, I had been idle a very long time, and I had no money, and I was living at other people's expense. You have been doing plenty of work here. As Mrs. Clay said, you have never been out of harness at all."

"Oh! so you can remember what Mrs. Clay said. I wonder if you ever remember anything that I say, or if you ever think about any questions that I have asked you. I don't suppose you do, or you would have answered them before now. However, it is just as much my business to work as it is yours—perhaps a little more, and so I mean to be off."

"Very well, then, you are quite right."

"And you are glad I am going?"

"No, I did not say I was glad. I only meant that, if you must work, the sooner

you begin the better. That was why I went away."

"If you hadn't been obliged to work, would you have gone?"

Hope coloured.

"I don't mean Miss Griselda; I know she was a stupid old woman, and behaved ever so badly to you, but did anything else make you go?"

"It is sometimes a good thing," answered Hope, evasively, "for people to work, even if they don't need to do it for a living. It keeps them from thinking too much. I have been a great deal happier since I have not had so much time to think."

Mac did not quite like that. Hope could not have had anything very pleasant to think about, or she would not have wanted to get away from the thinking. He enjoyed nothing half so much as walking up and down that little bit of mossy path by the

willow brook, with a cigar in his mouth, and a fishing-line in his hand, building castles in the air about a home he meant to make for himself some day out there in the West, with Hope Meredith for its queen. It was always more time for such thinking that he wanted, not less. And here was Hope, going with her heart and soul into real hard work, just that she might not need to think at all. Mac could not make it out. It did not look well for him.

“And then you talk about your duty,” he continued, “as if it wasn’t your duty to stay where you were making everybody happy. I’m sure, after nursing Madolin through that desperate illness, you had a right to make yourself as comfortable as you could for no end of a time, and I thought we were going to have a jolly summer together; and then nothing would serve but you must set off to earn your own living at

a hospital. As if there were not people in the world who would have been only too thankful to earn it for you."

And Mac looked like an ill-used man.

"I hope you will have a good voyage," said Hope, by way of escaping from the personality of the conversation. "Sir David will miss you very much."

"Bother Sir David!" said Mac, gruffly. "Shall *you* miss me? That is what I should like to know. I suppose Sir David can soon get an agent to do as well for him as I have ever done. If nobody wanted me any more than he does, I might have taken myself off long enough ago. *Shall* you miss me, Hope?"

"Not so much as if I had been staying at the Chase. Of course I should have missed you very much then."

Mac gave a grunt of discontent.

"It's all Miss Griselda and Miss Lauder-

dale between them. I don't know what's come to Madolin lately. She looks at a fellow sometimes as if she would snap his head off. What did she tell you about those flowers, Hope?"

"I can't remember exactly what she said. I understood her that the gardener had brought them in for me to take to the people at the hospital, and I said it was very kind of him, and I asked her to thank him for me."

"And was that all?"

"Yes, except that you were driving out somewhere, and so would not be at home to say good-bye to me."

"And didn't she tell you that I had gathered the forget-me-nots for you from the willow brook?"

"No; I did not know that you had had anything to do with them; but I was sure

they had come from the willow brook, and I took care of them."

"Did you? Have you got them now?"

"Yes. I put them in my Bible."

"Why?—because they came from the willow brook?—was that really it, Hope?"

Why should Hope be afraid to say yes? What harm could she do to anyone by telling the truth so far? So she did tell it, but told it very gravely, looking straight before her all the time. And then she called upon Mac to admire a beautiful bullfinch that was swinging upon the bough of an elm-tree close by.

"Yes, yes, it is very pretty, but don't keep beating off so. I can see a bullfinch any day, but I can't talk to you about those flowers. Wouldn't you have liked them better if you had known that I gathered them for you?"

"Yes, I think I should."

Hope said it very gravely still. She was determined not to move an inch from her own place; she could not make herself give over loving Mac, but she could keep herself from taking what belonged to some one else of better right. The little middle-class girl was very proud, after all. Mac tried to look into her face, but she would not turn.

"Would it make any difference to you, Hope," he began again, "supposing I were to stay a little longer in England? And if I wanted you not to keep on working at that hospital, but to get ready and go back with me, never to toil and labour any more, but to be taken care of all your life? And I would take such care of you!"

"I must keep working," said Hope, in a low, steady voice. "It is the only thing for me to do."

For she remembered Madolin Lauderdale's taunt, and Aunt Griselda's insinuations; and

though there might not be a drop of aristocratic blood in her veins, there was a whole world of brave independence in her heart. And would he marry her then out of pity? Was he only sorry for her because she was working so hard? Better work on to her grave than be married so. And he had never told her that he loved her—never asked her to love him. Ah! but Hope knew well enough, if he had asked her *that*, she could have given him only one reply.

Mac said no more. He drew himself up a little, whipped the ponies on, and they were soon in the suburbs of Matchborough. That last ten minutes seemed more like ten hours to Hope, sitting by his side, knowing that she had crushed her life's life out, and driven him away from her, yet was unable to speak the word which might have given them to each other.

“ Captain Cayley, may I get out and walk now ? ”

Mac started.

“ Oh ! yes, if you like. Are we near the place ? ”

“ Only about a quarter of a mile ; and I would like to walk now. ”

“ All right. ”

The ponies were stopped. Mac helped his companion out, not, however, spending much time over it.

“ I did gather you a few flowers, ” he said, “ whilst Bowles was getting the carriage ready. Will you like to have them ? ”

Hope looked up to say yes, and there were great tears in her eyes. Mac gave them to her without a word. He had had them in a little basket under the seat. What did she mean by looking up at him in that wistful way, when she had just told him she did not care for him ? It was not

flirting, but it was quite as bad, he thought.

“They won’t keep very long—they are mostly hothouse flowers; but those little wild buds came from the fir plantation.

Hope took them out, and put them in her belt. Mac looked wonderingly at her. She must care a little, unless she was doing it all for show. And the forget-me-nots were in her Bible, too! Ah, well, so long as he was not in her heart, it did not signify much where anything else was.

“Well, good-bye. I suppose I shall not see you again now?”

“No, perhaps not. Are you going very soon?”

“As soon as I can get a ship. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye.” And Hope walked quickly away.

When she had gone a few yards she turned. Mac had turned too, and was

looking after her. Then he drove on faster than ever, and was soon out of sight.

Hope went to her own room first, and laid the roses away, then took the other flowers to the patients. And everyone was so glad to see her, and so many hands were stretched out to touch her, and little faces brightened as she passed them by, and weary eyes lighted up. And then a poor man was brought in who had had a terrible accident, and he had to be dressed and attended to; and it was not until quite the dark of summer evening that Hope, at last safe in her parlour, with the roses pressed against her hot cheeks, could comfort herself with a good cry over all that she had done.

If Mac could have comforted himself so, it might have washed away some of his bitterness; but men's troubles are not got over in that way.

CHAPTER XXI.

INSTEAD, he went back to Nunthorpe Chase, and shutting himself up in the library, went through a lot of accounts. He would go up to London that very night and see after a ship. The sooner he was away the better now. He was vexed, wounded, disappointed. He never knew, until Hope's quietly-spoken words overthrew them, how sweet were the dreams which for the last three months he had been dreaming.

Well, there was nothing for it but to forget; and the sooner he forgot the better. Miss Lauderdale, too, why had she kept

back his message ? Not that it would have made much difference, though. Hope had told him that plainly enough. And she had taken care of the little flowers, too ; but what did that signify ? Just a piece of romance. One could not borrow a book from a girl, but dried leaves and flowers were sure to come tumbling out of it, which might have meant as much once, and had come to be nothing more than rubbish. If she had spoken him a kind word or two, and taken less care of his flowers, he would have thanked her.

Never mind. There was always room enough in the world for an honest man. He was no worse off now than when he came to England three months ago ; perhaps better, for he had learned to distrust women a little more, and that would make him careful how he gave one of them the chance of behaving so to him again. Things might

be worse. And so Mac plodded away at accounts until dinner-time.

“Are you really going away so soon?” said Madolin, as she played with her grapes at dessert, touching the bloom off with the tips of her delicate fingers. “So soon as next week?”

“Yes. That is if I can find a ship to sail then. It may be the week after—I can’t tell. I don’t see what is the use of staying on in England after my work is done.”

“Well, perhaps not; only that your friends might like to have you a little longer, and you would see more of the country.”

“Oh! I’ve seen enough of the country, and, besides, Canada is not such an immense way off that a fellow has no chance of coming home again. I may come back in a few years’ time, a grasping, middle-aged man,

and settle down to turtle soup and port wine for the rest of my days."

"A very comfortable settlement, too. There is nothing in the world I envy more than that serene, full-rounded repose which you gentlemen seem to attain after a nicely-cooked dinner. I would give away half my years, and all my hopes of turtle soup, if I could win such sublime content. But really, Uncle Mac, papa will miss you very much. You have been such a great help to him in business matters. I shall have to try to understand them myself now, for I suppose even the new steward, when he comes, will not be able to look after everything. Are accounts very hard?"

"Not for you, I should think. You have cleverness enough to accomplish anything that you set your mind upon."

There was a curious flash in Madolin's eyes as she turned them for a moment upon

Mac. Yes, most likely she *had* cleverness enough to accomplish anything that she set her mind upon. More cleverness, perhaps, than Mac, whose only skill was in the honest doing of his duty. And even the doing of his duty did not seem to have made him very rich yet; for by-and-by he said, in a rather anxious, hesitating sort of way,

“There is only one thing that might keep me from getting away from England so soon as I should like.”

Hope Meredith, Madolin thought. Perhaps he had not money enough to marry her, and take her out at once to a comfortable home. But, no, it was not Hope Meredith. Mac went on—

“There were some shares I wanted very much to buy, and the first deposit has to be paid down next week. My Canadian remittances are not due for a month, and I have no ready money at hand. I was

thinking of speaking to Sir David about it."

"Well, and why should you not? He generally has a good balance at the bank, and it seems a pity to let the shares drop."

"Yes," and Mac seemed to be turning the matter over in his mind; "he might let me have a few hundreds just now, and take the remittances when they come."

"Of course, that would be straightforward enough. I wonder you have not spoken to him about it before. I am quite sure he could make it all right for you."

Mac thought awhile.

"I believe I shall go up to London to-night, and make inquiry about them, and then go on to Brighton to-morrow night, or the day after. No, it would have to be the day after, because I might as well look after a ship too, and then I will ask Sir David about it. I think he would be willing to oblige me. If I do that, though, I must

go at once and finish up those accounts in the library."

"May I come with you? You said you would some day teach me to understand them."

"All right—come along. You won't have very much time to-night, but still it will be better than nothing. And besides, you must know where the cheque-book is, and the loose money, because you may perhaps have some payments to make before Sir David comes home."

They went into the library. Mac opened the table containing the iron chest, took out some account-books, and then the little roll of notes wrapped in a half-sheet of paper, containing a few figures and an order of admission to the Matchborough hospital.

Madolin looked sharply at him as he counted over the notes.

"You don't know," she said, with a

merry little laugh, "how I do want that roll of notes for my new emerald set. How much did you say?—two hundred and fifty pounds?"

"More than that. I brought some with me to-day from the Matchborough bank. This little handful of paper is worth nearly a thousand pounds."

"Oh! you don't mean it. I never saw so much money all at once before. How very, very useful it would be to me!"

"I daresay, and very useful to me too. It would just pay my first deposit for those shares."

"No, no, it would just pay for my new set of emeralds, and a little over for a diamond here and there. I will not let you have it for your stupid shares; they are not half so pretty as jewels."

"Certainly not; but the interest of them

is very useful. Now look at these accounts."

And Mac explained to her, as simply as he could, how the general accounts were kept, and showed her the different columns in which expenses were set down; and Madolin listened with eager interest, glancing now and again to the little drawer where the notes were kept. Nearly a thousand pounds' worth of them!

"I think that is about all. I need not do any more. Supposing I should not come down again before I start, everything is in order now, so that Sir David can easily explain to anyone who takes the management of matters. Let us pack up."

The books were returned to their places, the papers to their pigeon-holes. Just then Colin knocked at the door.

"Please, sir, could Jacob Lund speak with you for a moment?"

Mac went out of the room. A sudden gleam flashed across Madolin's face. She took the notes out of the drawer, folded as they were in the half-sheet of paper, and slipped them into her pocket. If, on his return, Mac looked into the drawer again, she could take them out of her pocket, count them carefully over in his sight, and say she had just done it for fun. Her little experiment would have failed, but that would be all. If he did not look, all would be right. Her own difficulty would be ended, and perhaps one begun for him which would be a sufficient punishment for the humiliation which he had inflicted upon her.

In a minute or two Mac returned.

"Jacob wants a note for the hospital. Tossie has hurt herself, and the doctor says she ought to go. I suppose Sir David will be glad to let him have one. There was an order wrapped round those bank notes, was

there not? I may as well take that."

"Oh, no; take one out of the cabinet drawer, where they are always kept. There were figures on that, you know. Here, I will get you it."

And Madolin took a fresh clean note out of the cabinet drawer.

"You will sign it, Mac. I believe they always have to be filled up before they are of any use."

"Of course, but I can't do it. You must put your own name. Here, take this pen."

Madolin began to fill up the form, but her hand trembled very much.

"You have given me such a start about poor Tossie," she said. "What is really the matter with her?"

"She sprained her shoulder, or something of that sort, two or three weeks ago; but she did not say anything about it, because she did not want to be kept in the house

whilst she was having her holiday. And now it is very much worse, and the doctor tells them it may be weeks before she is able to do her work again."

"Poor girl! Well, I am glad it is no worse than that. I thought perhaps she was nearly burnt or scalded to death. Here, Colin, take the note to Jacob Lund, and say that, if Tossie has to stay in the hospital beyond the month allowed by that order, Sir David will be glad to give her another."

"Yes, ma'am." And so Jacob went away in peace, thinking how kind a lady was the mistress of Nunthorpe Chase.

"And now I suppose this safe had better be shut up, and all the rest of the things You said you had finished the accounts."

"Yes," and Mac locked the chest, put the key in his pocket, then locked the writing-table, and gave that key to Madolin.

"You may perhaps want some papers out here, but the money in the chest will certainly not be wanted before next Friday, when some of the accounts are due. Perhaps I shall come down again myself to see after them ; if I don't, Sir David will have to come ; but at any rate, I will take the key, and I can give it to him when I go, the day after to-morrow."

"Will it be so long as the day after to-morrow before you see them at Brighton?"

"Yes, quite. I must go up to London by the night train now, make inquiries about some ships first thing to-morrow morning, then see after the shares, and finish some other business, which will take me all the rest of the day. And then I have people to see. Yes, it will be Saturday, at the earliest, before I put in an appearance at Regency Square."

"Then very likely I shall put in an ap-

pearance before you do, for I think of going over to see them to-morrow. It seems unkind never to have been yet, especially now that papa is not very well. Besides, you know I have something to congratulate Aunt Griselda about."

"Yes, so I suppose. The Colonel's suit has been speedy and successful. Well, then, I will wait until to-morrow morning, and we can both go by the early train."

"No, indeed, you shall do nothing of the sort," said Madolin, hastily. For Mac to be safely away from Nunthorpe as soon as possible, was the one thing to be desired now. "I could not think of letting you alter your plans for me. And besides, you know I dislike getting up early in a morning—it never was one of my strong points. No, you shall go to-night, as you intended, and I shall most likely take the afternoon train. That is, if I don't change my mind.

Perhaps, after all, I may decide to stay at home. It is only a fancy that has come into my mind about running over to see them."

"Then I shall go and look after my packing."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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